Al-Ahram Weekly

No 373 الاهرام ويكلي

Published in Cairo by AL-AHRAM established in 1875

16 - 22 April 1998 18 Pages P.T.75

Peace tops Blair's agenda

Tony Blair, interviewed by **Ibrahim Nafie**, spoke of the need to kick-start the stalemated Middle East peace process

Declaring deep concern that the spirit of Madrid and Oslo was evaporating, British Prime Minister Tony Blair said the European Union (EU) should make a fresh effort to break the deadlock in Middle East peace-making. But he also said any European effort should be complementary to the American role.

"We need to kick start the process," Blair said, in response to a set of written questions from *Al-Ahram*'s Editor-in-Chief. "I believe that the EU should have a role that reflects its economic contribution to the peace process and the historical ties and strong modern interests that bind our two regions together. But this role must also be complementary to that of the United States."

Blair, who arrives in Cairo tomorrow at the outset of a regional tour, said that from his regular contact with President Bill Clinton he was aware that the "US are frustrated that a breakthrough has not yet been achieved and that is a feeling we all share. But I do not have the impression that they are about to disengage... The Americans are best placed to take a lead in this way and we have been encouraging them to come forward with specific proposals."

Blair, whose country is current president of the EU, will meet with President Hosni Mubarak, Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri and Sheikh Mohamed Sayed Tantawi, the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar Mosque. He will also meet with Egyptian businessmen at a breakfast arranged by the British-Egyptian Businessmen's Association. In addition to Egypt, he will visit the Palestinian self-rule territories, Israel, Jordan and Saudi Arabia.

Asked about Foreign Secretary Robin Cook's meeting with a Palestinian official at the controversial settlement of Har Homa on the outskirts of Jerusalem, which triggered Israel's anger, Blair would only say: "The EU positions on settlements and on Jerusalem have not changed and are naturally shared by Britain."

Asked about Israel's conditional offer to withdraw from southern Lebanon, Blair said that Britain "would be pleased to see an Israeli withdrawal in accordance with Security Council Resolution 425. We welcomed the Israeli government's decision as a positive step in that direction."

Noting that Resolution 425 does not provide for conditions to be attached, Blair added that "all this would be easier if there were also progress toward a comprehensive settlement, particularly on the Syrian track."

Affirming commitment to Israel's security, Blair recalled that Cook "underlined during his visit that we expect a 100 per cent commitment on the part of the Palestinian Authority to the security effort. This is one of the key foundations for a lasting peace."

He said the EU wanted to help the Palestinians discharge their security commitments. "During my visit, I hope we will be able to finalise arrangements for a mechanism to formalise EU/Palestinian security cooperation," he added.

Asked whether Britain's refusal to grant visas to some Egyptian militants planning to attend an Islamist conference in London marked a change in its position on militants living on its soil, Blair responded: "Wherever we have sufficient evidence to frustrate terrorism, or support for terrorism, we take action. There were reports linking this conference to the Gama'a Al-Islamiya. It was for this reason that we refused visas to individuals seeking to attend. We would take the same action in similar circumstances. We remain determined that the UK should not be used as a base for terrorism overseas in any way."

Blair disclosed that Home Secretary Jack Straw will be publishing a consultation paper shortly with proposals for strengthening British counter-terrorism laws. The legislation, he said, will probably be brought forward during the next session of Parliament.

Blair lavished praise on the Egyptian economic reform programme. "In the past few years, Egypt has transformed itself in the eyes of the business world. The economic reform programme has achieved a renaissance which most finance ministers only dream of," he said.

Blair added that "Britain is a major stake holder in this transformation. We invest more in Egypt than any other non-Arab country except America... Trade is growing... The British and Egyptian armed forces also enjoy a close relationship."

Responding to another question, Blair said: "As president of the EU, Britain is determined to develop the EU's relationship with Egypt as one of our key economic partners in the Mediterranean region. If at all possible, we have to bring the process of negotiating a new Association Agreement to a successful conclusion. The agreement will move our relationship to a new level and bring very real economic benefits to both sides, as well as providing for closer political dialogue."

(Full interview text p.5)

Egypt-Syria summit talks

SYRIAN President Hafez Al-Assad arrived in Cairo yesterday and held talks with President Hosni Mubarak on the latest Middle East developments, reports Nevine Khalil. The talks focused on the outcome of a Syrian-Lebanese summit that was held in Latakia earlier this week and an Israeli proposal for a conditional withdrawal from southern Lebanon which both Lebanon and Syria rejected.

Mubarak and Assad first met without aides and were later joined by Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri, Defence Minister Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi, Foreign Minister Amr Moussa, Information Minister Safwat El-Sherif and Presidential Adviser Osama El-Baz. From the Syrian side, Vice-President Abdel-Halim Khaddam, Foreign Minister Farouk Al-Shara and Ambassador Eissa Darwish took part in the talks.

Mayor freed

A DAY after Iranian riot police clashed with 4,000 people demonstrating in support of Tehran's mayor, Gholamhossein Karbaschi, the Iranian spiritual guide and supreme authority, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei agreed to release him on bail pending trial on charges of misappropriating public funds.

The English language newspaper *Iran News* said Khamenei agreed to free Karbaschi after receiving a written appeal from the Iranian President Mohammad Khatami and the former President Hashemi Rafsanjani, AFP reported. A court had earlier rejected an earlier appeal for release on bail prompting Tuesday's demonstration.

Late release

A SENIOR leader of the radical Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine was released yesterday after being held by Israel for nearly six years without being charged. Ahmed Qatamesh was the longest-held prisoner in Israel's so-called administrative detention.

Human rights groups had been campaigning for his release together along with 200 other Palestinian activists held without trial, the AP reported.

INSIDE



THREE days from now Copts celebrate Easter — a week after Palm Sunday — the ritual, as always, interspersed with festivities. And on Monday the celebrations continue with Shamm El-Nasim, an ancient feast of pharaonic origin, heralding the arrival of spring

photo: Emad Nasri

Diverse games

EGYPTIAN and US naval forces begin the annual Eagle Salute exercise off the Safaga coast of the Red Sea on Saturday, reports Galal Nassar. The live ammunition exercise, which will end on Monday night, will feature rescue operations, escorting an important shipment and repulsing an air attack.

Frigates, destroyers, missile boats, anti-submarine helicopters, early warning planes and jet-fighters will take part in the war games.

The participating American units have already arrived at the Safaga naval base and their commanders have held coordination meetings with their Egyptian counterparts. The exercise will coincide with a regional tour by US Defence Secretary William Cohen that is scheduled to begin today and will include Turkey, Greece, Egypt, Israel and Jordan.

Cohen, who arrives in Cairo on Sunday, will hold talks with President Hosni Mubarak and Defence Minister Field Marshal Mohamed Hussein Tantawi. The talks will focus on military and security issues related to Middle East peace-making as well as the volatile situation in the Gulf. They will also address Egyptian-US military cooperation, including joint exercises and US arms exports to Egypt, which are financed by an annual $1.3 billion grant.

The Egyptian armed forces, on the other hand, will observe Sinai Day (25 April) by staging a large scale exercise east of the Suez Canal on Tuesday and Wednesday. Units from all forces will take part in the exercise, which will simulate the repulse of a cross-border enemy attack, involving the use of weapons of mass destruction. The games feature defensive and offensive operations aimed at restoring the status quo by repulsing and destroying the attacking forces.

Unearthing the recent past

More than 10 years after they were discovered, Jewish papers known as new *Geniza* are being documented for the first time. **Omayma Abdel-Latif** reports

On 29 September 1940, a call was issued to "all the Jews of Egypt" to conduct a special service, so that "God may protect Egypt" from the flames of war raging to its west, north and east. According to a document written in Arabic and Hebrew and kept at the Islamic Museum, the call for prayers was made at the behest of King Farouk. The document notes that Muslims have offered prayers on 15 Shaaban, a Muslim holy occasion, and invites Jews to do likewise on *Yom Kippur* — the Jewish Day of Atonement.

The document is but one of a collection of more than 200 papers, dealing with all aspects of Jewish life in Egypt, including education, religious worship, finance and social affairs, and spanning a period from the end of the 19th century until the 1960s.

It was in November 1987 when workers, carrying out a routine clean-up at the Mosseri cemetery in Bassatin, which belongs to an erstwhile influential Jewish family, came across a room where piles of sacred books and secular documents were preserved.

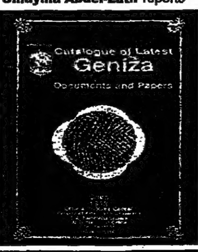
"These documents have been studied thoroughly and will be authenticated soon for the first time," Mohsen Rabie, head of the Jewish antiquities department at the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA), told *Al-Ahram Weekly*.

Declaring that the documents were of "great interest," Rabie said they include petitions, deeds, donations, invitations for festivals and literary works and cover cultural, social and religious activities.

"They prove that Jews who lived in Egypt in modern times practiced *Geniza* — the act of preserving or concealing Jewish documents in a synagogue or a cemetery," Rabie said. "The word also refers to the place where the documents are kept."

Rabie and other Jewish history experts attach great importance to these documents because "this is the first time that *Geniza* documents have been researched and published in Egypt by Egyptian researchers."

Unlike other *Geniza* documents discovered in Egypt, which cover the period from 969 to 1538, "these deal with a more recent period of the history of the Jewish community," said Prof. Mohamed Hassan Khalifa, head of the Oriental Studies Centre of Cairo University.



The centre has established a special division to research the new documents and its experts have produced the first catalogue of *Geniza* papers to be published in Arabic.

The 78-page *Catalogue of Latest Geniza Documents and Papers* lists a series of invitations, literary works, prayers and complaints as well as warnings against dealing with certain butchers who do not observe *kosher* food regulations. There is also a 1949 announcement about the "day of *Geniza*" when all the prayer books were to be transferred to a cave in the Bassatin area.

"They had their places and traditions but they did not live in ghettos. Ghettos only existed in Europe but not in Egypt or any other Arab country because Jews were an integral part of the social fabric of Egypt," Rabie said.

To prove his point, Rabie quoted a newspaper, *Al-Kaleem*, published by young Orthodox Jews, who reported a visit by "President Mohamed Naguib to the synagogue of the Karaite Jewish sect on 25 November 1952."

A second paper shows that an Egyptian Jew was running for parliamentary elections. A third was a personal note of a date between a man and his girlfriend in front of l'Americaine — the downtown coffee-shop.

Some of the documents cover a period in which Arab-Jewish tension came to the fore and the papers reflect the effects of these tensions. An Arabic-language letter urges the Jewish community to donate money to the Jews of Palestine and clearly states that the currency in which the donations should be made is the Palestinian pound. An earlier Hebrew-language document, dating back to 1886, is also a letter from a Zionist to other Jews, urging emigration to Zion — wherever this may have been, then.

"During the research, we came across many papers which could be described as Zionist propaganda, some of which reflected the political trends of Jews at the time," one of the researchers said.

However, the documents did not include any specific plan to force the Jews of Egypt to emigrate to Palestine. "Apart from the personal letters, there is no indication of this in the documents," Khalifa said.

In the hope that more records will be found, the Jewish antiquities department of the SCA is planning to survey other Jewish cemeteries in Helwan and Alexandria.

Any survey of Jewish tombs and synagogues is carried out in cooperation with the Jewish community in Egypt and its head, Easter Wenstein. But Rabie said that the SCA would not accept any Israeli offer of restoring or searching Jewish archaeological sites. Israel had offered to donate money for the restoration of Jewish monuments but a Culture Ministry source said the offer was turned down.

"These synagogues and tombs are Egyptian heritage like the mosques and churches and when they need restoration or researching, it should be done by Egyptian sources and financed by the government of Egypt," Rabie said.



Mubarak during his talks with British parliamentarians, led by Purchase (left) and attended by House Speaker Sorour (right)

MPs for peace

British MPs visiting Cairo this week said they will set up a parliamentary group to confer on the peace process with their counterparts in the region. **Nevine Khalil** reports

As Cairo prepared to receive British Prime Minister Tony Blair on his inaugural visit to the region, a delegation of eight members of the House of Commons met with a number of top Egyptian officials, led by President Hosni Mubarak, to discuss the peace process and bilateral relations. The delegation also met with People's Assembly Speaker Fathi Sorour, Foreign Minister Amr Moussa and Minister of Tourism Mamdouh El-Beltagui.

During talks with Mubarak, the delegation discussed the faltering peace process, of which the president "painted a very difficult picture", delegation leader Ken Purchase told reporters. "Nonetheless, [Mubarak] is determined that there will be a peace process continuing to a successful conclusion," he said.

The delegation praised Mubarak's "frankness; we could have expected no more," said Purchase, adding that a "British-Egyptian all-party group" of parliamentarians will be established "in order that the voice of ordinary members of parliaments and councils are properly heard." The group will attempt "to make significant contact, confer and discuss with our [counterparts] in Israel and the Arab world", in the hope that British MPs could play "a small but important role in bearing down on fellow parliamentarians in Israel," according to Purchase.

"The historical mission [of peace] must be restarted in a positive way to ensure that the world is safe and prosperous," Purchase said. "I believe that the [peace] process will have to be kick-started and ultimately there will be a successful outcome." Another member of the delegation, who spoke on condition of anonymity, was more critical — squarely blaming Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu for the current stalemate. He told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that "it is clear that Netanyahu is determined not to implement the Oslo agreement," and that he must be pressured to do so.

Mubarak did not raise with the delegation the issue of Egyptian expatriate Islamist militants currently residing and seeking asylum in Britain, a problem which has lately weighed heavily on Egyptian-British relations. Recently, Egyptian sources told the *Weekly* that London is committed to stricter surveillance of suspects living on its territory and also to a greater exchange of security information with Cairo.

Purchase said that the British parliament is currently studying a new "conspiracy law" which would make it illegal for individuals to conspire against another country while residing in Britain. He added that Britain was also exploring "other ways in which we might assist Middle Eastern countries in particular in controlling the difficulties caused by extremists." Purchase noted that there was "considerable cooperation between British and Egyptian intelligence authorities to ensure that maximum security is afforded and that we deal promptly and expeditiously with extremists."

MP David Wilshire told the *Weekly* that Egypt must provide Britain with hard evidence against convicted militants residing in the UK before they are extradited. "We must have papers to get a court order to hand these men over," Wilshire said, adding that the Egyptians have not provided the required documents to begin such procedures.

Wilshire also noted that "it is easier to hand over an indicted murderer than someone who is accused of a political crime." Once the issue is politicised — for example by the expatriate militants claiming that their rights are being abused or their freedoms are being stifled in Egypt — "Amnesty International and other human rights groups interfere, making it very problematic," Wilshire said.

The delegation member who requested anonymity told the *Weekly* that he acknowledges that "at least three evil men [expatriate militants] live in Britain, but we need the documents to hand them over." One of them is "the one involved in the attempted assassination of the prime minister," he said, referring to Yasser Sirry, who was sentenced to death in absentia for his involvement in the attack on then-Prime Minister Atef Sidqi in 1994.

Egypt-France anti-terrorism cooperation

DURING a three-day visit to Egypt, French Interior Minister Jean-Pierre Chevenement met separately on Monday with Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri, Foreign Minister Amr Moussa, Interior Minister Habib El-Adli and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Sheikh Mohamed Sayed Tantawi, reports **Mona El-Nahas**. Following the meeting with El-Adli, the two interior ministers held a joint press conference, at which Chevenement praised the efforts made by the security authorities to protect tourist sites in Luxor and Aswan. He said he was confident the Egyptian tourism industry will pick up again as long as the security forces keep tight control on the archaeological sites.

Chevenement said that France did not share the sentiments of those countries which had advised their nationals not to visit Egypt following last November's Luxor massacre. "We did not provide such advice to our citizens who are keen to visit Egypt with their families and who are satisfied with the security measures taken here," he said. "It is enough that you see me here. I'm living proof that Egyptian security is okay."

Chevenement's visit was his first to Egypt since he took up his post last year.

Asked about his meeting with Sheikh Tantawi, Chevenement said they discussed the possibility of exchanging visits between Egyptian and French men of religion. The French minister, who is in charge of religious affairs in his country, said that he is encouraging the establishment of a higher institute for Islamic studies in France. This institute, he added, will help project the true image of Islam, the religion of more than two million French citizens.

The French minister also expressed his country's readiness to cooperate with Egypt in combating terrorist organisations active in Europe.

Pirates convicted in absentia

THE SUPREME State Security Court sentenced two Turks in absentia on Sunday to 15 years' imprisonment with hard labour, holding them responsible for the abduction of eight Egyptians aboard a cargo vessel that fled the Suez Canal to international waters to avoid the payment of debts owed to local shipping companies.

The trial of Nagi Usakli, captain of the Obo Engin, and shipowner Helmi Adelair, lasted only five minutes before presiding judge Mahmoud Refki handed down the sentences.

Judicial sources said Cairo will notify Interpol to seek the extradition of the two Turks. If they are extradited, the two will face a second trial.

The incident, unprecedented in the history of the Suez Canal, took place last October. The Obo Engin, carrying 44,000 tons of coal from Singapore to Istanbul, was held upon a court order for five days at Suez harbour until its owner paid a debt of $180,000 to a local shipping company.

The ship was then ordered to head to Port Said, at the northern end of the Canal, where a second shipping company had won another court verdict, ordering the owner to pay $375,000 in debts.

But when the ship reached Port Said, with eight Egyptians on board, including policemen and officials, the captain sped full ahead and escaped into the international waters of the Mediterranean.

Two naval boats gave chase, but failed to stop the vessel. Turkish authorities released the Egyptians as soon as they arrived in Turkey after a five-day journey and sent them back to Egypt.

Egypt lodged a complaint with the Turkish authorities at the time, but no official request for extradition has so far been filed, Foreign Ministry sources told *Al-Ahram Weekly*.

No natural gas for Israel

Other partners yes, but there will be no natural gas exports to Israel, Minister of Petroleum El-Banbi told **Aziza Sami**

"We have not resumed talks on exporting natural gas to Israel," said Minister of Petroleum Hamdi El-Banbi in response to press reports that Egypt and Israel have revived the long-stalled negotiations over gas exports.

El-Banbi said that "talks stopped a long time ago. Nothing is at issue here because Israel does not have a national natural gas infrastructure."

With Turkey a priority in Egypt's $2-4 billion mega-project to export natural gas, other markets are being considered as well, El-Banbi said. "Negotiations are currently under way to include Jordan and Lebanon and possibly the Palestinian National Authority." And with Europe the region's largest potential market, Italy is yet another possible partner.

But the plan does not include Israel. "Any deal we negotiate with any party is at least a 25-year commitment, and so we have to be very slow and careful in our studies of any project," said El-Banbi.

Nevertheless, the lingering issue of exporting natural gas to Israel has not been laid to rest. There are reports that a third party is currently lobbying with Egypt to persuade it to negotiate a deal with Israel.

The Egyptian government's position has been determined not only by technical considerations, but also by the political setbacks in Middle East peacemaking resulting from the intransigence of the Israeli Likud government under Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu. In earlier statements to the press, El-Banbi said the natural gas talks ground to a halt as a result of the deadlock in the peace process.

But, speaking to *Al-Ahram Weekly*, he focused on the technical difficulties. "There were talks and meetings with a succession of ministers, even before Israel launched a study to install a national natural gas infrastructure, but this infrastructure never materialised," El-Banbi said.

Despite the technical difficulties, Israel is setting a high priority on negotiating Egyptian natural gas imports which it considers an important step in the "regional integration" emerging from the Middle East/North Africa (MENA) arrangement. But the $2-4 billion project announced at the 1996 Cairo MENA conference took observers by surprise because it targeted Turkey, not Israel. Now Israel is showing greater interest in negotiating an agreement with Egypt because a natural gas deal it tried to finalise with Qatar has faltered due to technical difficulties.

On the Egyptian side, the main partners in the natural gas export project are the Egyptian General Petroleum Corporation and two of Egypt's largest concession holders, Amoco Egypt Oil Company, and Italy's Agip, operating through its subsidiary, International Egyptian Oil Company (IEOC).

Agip, a major partner in the natural gas export project, has long advocated a "peace pipeline", passing through the Gaza Strip, Israel and Jordan, as the most economically viable means of exporting gas to the region.

The only concrete step that has been taken so far is the memorandum of understanding signed at the MENA Cairo conference between the Egyptian General Petroleum Corporation and Turkey's Botas Petroleum Pipeline Corporation. But other aspects of the project, including potential partners, continue to be in a state of flux.

At the end of last year, Amoco announced that Port Said was chosen as a preliminary site for a natural gas liquefaction plant from which the gas will be transported in liquid state by tankers to Turkey. Now, there seem to be other possibilities. According to El-Banbi, "nothing has been decided yet; we are still in the stage of feasibility studies."

"We are investigating the different sites for a natural gas liquefaction plant," said Art McHaffie, vice-president of the East Mediterranean Department of Amoco Engineering Development Company. Amoco is a major shareholder in the company set up for the project. He said that "talks are under way between EGPC and Inter-Jordan Gas Company for establishing a pipeline across the Gulf of Aqaba."

But the possibility of a project including Israel does not seem to be completely dormant. "Lebanon has expressed interest in being supplied with Egyptian natural gas via pipeline," said McHaffie, "which will go through Jordan and Syria, or maybe Israel."

Old Scud file stirs new anger

A Swiss official has reiterated allegations that his country blocked a Scud missile shipment to Cairo two years ago. **Dina Ezzat** reports on Egyptian anger

Egypt has officially expressed its anger and perplexity to the Swiss government, whose Federal Police Chief has recently repeated allegations that in 1996, Switzerland blocked a shipment of Scud missile parts being shipped from North Korea and China to Egyptian defence firms.

The Swiss ambassador to Cairo was summoned to the Foreign Ministry this week and informed of Egypt's ire.

"So many questions come to mind when one tries to understand why a Swiss official would revive these allegations two years after they were first made," commented Foreign Minister Amr Moussa. "Were the allegations brought up again in good or bad faith? Why now?"

Moussa added: "We would have liked to see Switzerland maintain its traditional and acknowledged impartiality when it comes to issues of mass destruction and other [non-conventional] weapons."

In 1996, the allegations were made during an Arab summit convened in Cairo to coordinate action to save the peace process from the impact of the intransigent policies of Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu.

At the time, Egypt responded by affirming that "opening the file of missiles and anti-missile [technology] in the region would mean that all the countries of the region should answer questions." This was a clear, if implicit, reference to Israel's nuclear arsenal, which has never been opened to international inspection.

According to statements made by Ura Von Daeniken, the Swiss Federal Police chief, two shipments of spare parts were seized in late 1996 at Zurich airport following a tip-off from Swiss intelligence.

Swiss authorities must approve any transit through Switzerland of parts which could serve in the assembling of weapons. According to Daeniken, the cargo had been declared to contain machine and bulldozer parts.

Daeniken suggested that he was "referring to the case" to give an example of the efficiency and usefulness of the anti-espionage service, the future of which will be decided in a public referendum scheduled for June.

An Egyptian source who spoke on condition of anonymity said Cairo is worried that this statement, made at this particular time, "could well be an attempt on the part of the Swiss to contain the recent espionage disputes between Bern and Tel Aviv." The statement, moreover, "comes at a time when the Swiss government is trying to avoid a confrontation with powerful Jewish groups over the large amounts of gold confiscated from European Jews during World War II and deposited in Swiss banks," he added.

Egypt is also annoyed, official sources say, because the "alleged source made reference to China". According to one source, "the last time we heard this story, it was Scud missiles coming from North Korea. Now we hear that China was also involved? One wonders if this could be read as an innocent attempt by a Swiss official to maintain the continuity of his intelligence service."

Egypt advocates the elimination of weapons of mass destruction from the Middle East, provided that Israel "refrains from developing or acquiring" these weapons and joins the other Middle Eastern countries in signing the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).

"Israel's nuclear arsenal is by far both more developed and larger than the nuclear programme of any other country in the region, including Iran — over which the Israeli government has been making such a fuss," said one source.

According to the most recent edition of *The Nonproliferation Review*, published by the Monterey Institute of International Studies, Israel possesses missiles with a 7,500km range. By comparison, the most powerful missile in Egypt's arsenal has a range of 450km, while Iran possesses missiles ranging at best over 1,000km.

Moreover, both Egypt and Iran have already signed the NPT, while Israel categorically refuses to do so.

Unlike Israel, Egypt has also signed the Biological Weapons Convention. As for the Chemical Weapons Convention, Egypt says it will not sign unless Israel joins the NPT. "When you have a situation of serious imbalance, you cannot work to endorse it," affirmed one source.

Officials and diplomats often refer to President Mubarak's initiative to banish weapons of mass destruction, made in 1990, at a time when Iraq and Israel were engaged in a war of words over their respective arsenals.

When the United Nations Security Council issued Resolution 687, the first resolution ever to call for the dismantling of a nation's arsenal of weapons of mass destruction — in this case, Iraq's — Egypt worked with a number of countries to include a paragraph in this resolution stipulating that the disarmament effort in Iraq should be a first step towards making the Middle East a region free from weapons of mass destruction.

Moreover, in 1974, Egypt introduced to the UN General Assembly a resolution calling for the creation of a zone free of weapons of mass destruction in the Middle East. This resolution was adopted unanimously in 1980.

West vs the rest?

Should Arabs stand up to globalisation mania or make their own contribution to the process? **Omayma Abdel-Latif** listened to a heated debate

To globalise or not to globalise? That was not the question to which some 40 Arab intellectuals, gathering in Cairo this week, sought an answer. Rather, the question was: what to make out of the globalisation process and whether the Arabs should make their own input?

For five days, intellectuals from across the political spectrum struggled to come to terms with the globalisation process and debated its effects on Arab cultural identity.

While some warned against being rushed into embracing "this new religion" — a term coined by Islamic thinker Ahmed Kamal Abul-Magd — others argued that the process was ongoing and that talk of accepting or rejecting it was premature.

Egyptian presidential adviser Osama El-Baz, addressing the opening session, conceded that no national scheme was produced to counterbalance any adverse effects globalisation may have. He said that the cultural factor in globalisation should not be neglected.

"It is a process by which the world should move into individualism, universality, secularism and rationalisation. These are the basic landmarks of the way to modernisation as the Western cultural establishments sell it," El-Baz said.

He argued that unless the process takes into consideration the diversity of cultures around the world, "it is doomed to failure. The United States has failed to force the world into accepting its cultural code," El-Baz said. "The same thing will happen to globalisation. People will only take what suits them and reject the rest of the package."

Culture Minister Farouk Hosni, addressing an audience which included government officials, leftist and Islamic thinkers from Egypt, Iraq, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco, Saudi Arabia and Sudan, described the rhetorical baggage of globalisation as the "promotion of an ideology whose tenets remain obscure.

"The issue of globalisation has imposed itself on the dialogue between cultures," Hosni said. "It reflects the beliefs, aspirations and culture of one party that always acted as the exporter of cultural trends, political ideologies and economic problems while we have been sticking to our favourite place at the end of the receiving line."

Economic hegemony was a globalisation-related issue highlighted in the conference. There was consensus that the new economic trends, such as privatisation and free market policies, were one way of selling globalisation to the world.

Sabri Hafez, a professor of Arabic literature at the University of London, demanded that the "untold facts about globalisation be disclosed to the people.

"In Western societies, the process of globalisation is meant to bridge the gap between rich and the poor, but in Third World countries the gap between the haves and have-nots is ever widening," he said.

Safynaz Kazem, a journalist and literary critic, struck a pessimistic note. "In vain have we struggled. The Arab world has already undergone an overall change that affected its cultural norms," she said. "We are now living behind the closed doors of globalisation and there is no turning back."

The discussions also had a political tinge. While touching briefly on the challenges posed by a post-ideology era, many speakers focused on the "old politics" the Arabs are using to deal with these challenges.

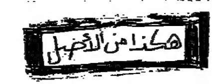
"We are on the threshold of the third millennium and yet most Arab states are governed by dictatorships. The potential of civil society has been reduced. There has not been one single free election held in any of the Arab countries in the past decade," said El-Sayed Yassin, former head of the Al-Ahram Centre for Political and Strategic Studies.

Abul-Magd chose to tread on different territory by insisting that the Arab contribution to the process of globalisation should stem from their "traditional frame of reference" — religion and social norms and traditions.

"There should be a formula whereby moral and religious values, which are part of the social life of eastern cultures, would be an integral part of the process of universality," Abul-Magd said.

Abul-Magd cited verses from the Qur'an which, he said, encouraged universality. He went as far as to urge a total change of the religious discourse, particularly the Islamic discourse, to place the emphasis on the universality of Islam as a religion and a culture.

Gaber Asfour, secretary-general of the Supreme Council of Culture and the conference coordinator, called for a dialogue between eastern cultures. "It is not that we are calling for a West-vs-the-rest situation, but eastern cultures have always had a moral tinge, and this could be our contribution to the world's new culture," Asfour said.





The LE10 million security system for the Egyptian Museum was inaugurated by Culture Minister Hosni (above); the system includes 178 cameras linked to a closed television circuit

photos: Khaled El-Fiqi

High-tech protection for the ancients

A new high-tech security system at the Egyptian Museum has been unveiled. **Nevine El-Aref** reports from secure confines

Almost a year and a half ago, a burglar nearly walked out of the Egyptian Museum in Tahrir Square with priceless items from Tutankhamun's collection before being stopped at the last minute. Realising the need for tighter security, authorities immediately launched plans to install a state-of-the-art security system to guard the invaluable artifacts against theft and fire. The system, put in place in 14 months by the National Security Department, was officially inaugurated last Sunday by a beaming Farouk Hosni, the culture minister.

The LE10 million system includes 178 cameras, linked to a closed television circuit, that keep the museum's halls, library, store-room, garden, fence, roof and surrounding streets under close watch around the clock. The cameras are operated by guards in a control room where 32 monitors show every inch of the museum. The control room is linked to the office of the museum's curator.

Moreover, 200 infrared motion detectors have been mounted to keep watch on sections of the museum which are off-limits to the public. There are also 250 sensors to guard against any attempt to break the glass of display cases. A microwave link system is wired to the museum's enclosure walls and gates to guard against break-ins.

There are eight electronic gates for visitors and workers. The gates are equipped with sensors to discover any hidden weapons.

An electronic ticketing system monitors the number of people entering the museum and determines if they have left at the end of the day. "These machines can count, minute by minute, the number of visitors moving in and out of the museum," explained Gaballah Ali Gaballah, secretary-general of the Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA). "There will be no repeat performance of a thief hiding inside the museum after closing hours."

Ahmed Nawwar, head of the museums department at the Culture Ministry, said that a burglar alarm system has also been installed, adding that the old wooden gates were replaced with armoured ones. Open sarcophagi — possible hiding places — have been shielded with unbreakable glass. Old show cases were replaced by new ones.

Gaballah said that an automatic fire-extinguishing system was also installed in the library and in the main power-generating room. There are also 30 loud-speakers to broadcast announcements to visitors in case of an emergency.

The museum is patrolled by security guards who are equipped with walkie-talkies connected to the control room.

The minister also inaugurated three newly-renovated rooms displaying treasures from the Tutankhamun collection as well as jewellery and objects from Tanis and other sites. The renovation included the installation of new lighting, ventilation and air-conditioning systems and the re-arrangement of items on display.

"These collections are the most wonderful objects ever excavated and they deserve the best treatment, both in terms of display and safety," said Hosni. "The use of fibre optic lighting allows visitors to admire the treasures in bright light while protecting them from the destructive glare of the sun."

A renovation plan for the entire museum will be launched in September, Hosni added. He said the museum will contain special artifacts until a new museum is built on a 117-feddan area near the Giza Pyramids.

Chronicle of a death foretold

The recent death of a young man while in police custody in a small Nile Delta town puts to the test a promise by Interior Minister Habib El-Adli to improve relations between police and citizens. **Fatemah Farag** reports from Bilqass

Whoever coined the phrase "as light as air" has never been to Bilqass. In this small town in the governorate of Daqahliya, the air is heavy with heat, dust, news of the violent death of a young man while in police custody and a pervasive feeling of mistrust.

The victim is Wahid Ahmed Abdallah, a 25-year-old labourer, who died last Thursday, allegedly as a result of three hours of torture at the Bilqass police station. The event sparked two days of rioting and clashes with police in which another young man, Hamada El-Sayed El-Me'addawi, was killed, an unspecified number of people were wounded and 32 taken into custody.

The tell-tale signs of the strife are all over town. Around every other corner a police armoured personnel carrier or Central Security Forces truck is positioned, broken glass still clutters the sidewalks around the major government buildings and, on the dusty asphalt beneath the hooves of the sickly horses pulling buggies, are black stains caused by fires.

The Mansoura prosecutor's office has launched an investigation into Wahid's death. The main suspect, Police Captain Ihab Shabana, head of the Bilqass investigation department, has been temporarily suspended by the Ministry of the Interior. The coroner's report, released on 13 April, confirmed that Wahid's death was caused by injuries which may have resulted from torture.

"It was 3.30am. when police stormed in to arrest Wahid," recounted El-Sayyed Rizk Ramadan, one of several uncles. "Police said he was wanted for questioning in connection with a theft in which his step-brother was involved. We did not bother to follow him because it is normal for police to storm in and take people in for the simplest reasons. Normally they will be kept at the police station for a few hours, possibly a day or two... Maybe a few slaps and that is it." In this case however, the police truck returned at around 5.30am, leaving Wahid's body on the doorstep. "By the time his mother's husband realised the truck was outside and went out, the police were running off. One of the informers called out and said, 'Go check him because he has fainted,'" Ramadan said.

By then Wahid's extended family — who live in a handful of neighbouring mud hovels on the edge of a wheat field in the village of Wabour El-Nour — were up and about, trying to get medical aid. "His clothes were full of vomit and there were dark marks on his stomach, arms, chest, and feet as well as the pinchmarks left by a metal clothespin. The local doctor would not come and when we got the ambulance, the driver told us: 'He is dead and I cannot take him in my car,'" said Fawzia, an aunt.

Sitting some on their one bed, others on the dirt floors of their hovels, which have no electricity, no water, no glass even in their wooden-shuttered windows, the family members told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that they could not take this shock lying down. "Tomorrow it could be me or one of them," explained Ramadan as he pointed to the mob of children crowding at the door. So the family put the body onto a donkey-cart and took it back to the police station, in the centre of Bilqass.

Anyone can tell you the story from there on. "It was about 7.00am. and we put the body in front of the station," recounted Said, an old friend and neighbour of Wahid. "His whole family was there and the women were screaming. The district police commander [Ibrahim Abdel-Samie] came out and told us, 'take your misery out of here.' Everyone on the street heard it and anger broke out."

The prosecutor's office, a few streets away, was notified and, according to eye-witnesses, the district prosecutor for Bilqass, Ahmed Khatab, was at the scene by 7.30am. A coroner had to be called in from Manzala and by 4.00pm. all legal procedures had been completed and the body was ready for burial.

"The timing of the burial was the big problem," said a high official at the prosecutor's office, who spoke on condition of anonymity. "To get the body out of town it had to be taken through the main streets, and when people saw it they thought that we were not going to take any action regarding the family's allegation [of police brutality]."

Ahmed Samir El-Gabri, a lawyer whose office is located directly opposite the Bilqass courthouse, recounted how the riots broke out. "People started coming out of the alleyways towards the main street, shouting slogans like: 'Where is the government — the murdered man is here'. The police started shooting tear gas, rubber bullets and buckshot." It was the latter which killed El-Me'addawi, who was moved to the emergency section of the Bilqass hospital, then immediately buried.

A sandwich vendor who works near the city council finshes the tale. "The streets were filled with people who didn't know exactly what to do and they would come to a building and ask, 'Is this a government building?' and if the answer was 'yes', they would start throwing stones and attacking it."

Hence, the post office, city council, court house, prosecutor's office, as well as a near-by sugar factory, were all the targets of the people's wrath. Thirty-six citizens were initially arrested. Four were later released and the remaining 32 were ordered to be held in custody for 15 days.

The ministry is also launching an administrative investigation into Abdel-Samie's conduct, while Wahid's family members were summoned by the prosecutor on 12 April to give their testimony. A trump card for the family is the testimony of Reda Ibrahim El-Saqqa. According to Gamal Barakat, a lawyer with the Egyptian Organisation for Human Rights who has been shuttling between Mansoura and Bilqass investigating the death, El-Saqqa was questioned in the same room in which Wahid was allegedly tortured. El-Saqqa's testimony provided a detailed description of Wahid's torture.

At the same time, Wahid's family members claim that from the time they took the body back to the station until its burial, they were detained at the police station and abused. One aunt has her arm in plaster, while a cousin shows a big bruise on his face and Ramadan limps about with the aid of a cane. The prosecutor's office says the claims are not true, but in Bilqass the issue of alleged police brutality seems to go beyond the Wahid affair. Identical stories of forced entries, random arrests and mistreatment are told everywhere. "That is why people were so violent during the past few days. There is a lot of tension which has been building up over a long period of time and had to be released," explained El-Gabri.

The official at the prosecutor's office had a different explanation. "It was just a deviant minority, some criminal people who did this," he said, speaking against an extensive background of broken glass windows.

"There is no torture at the police station... It is not torture... You have to realise that the officers are dealing with criminals. Do you think the criminals are going to confess on their own?... But it is not torture," the prosecution official said. He admitted that his office receives many complaints regarding police brutality but added, "the criminals want to get back at the officers and so they [the complaints] are not necessarily true." He added that his office undertakes routine checks of the police station and that no signs of torture had been found.

However, Mohamed Zaraa, director of the Human Rights Centre for the Assistance of Prisoners, explained to the *Weekly* that such checks are limited to inspecting the books. "The prosecutors will check the books to make sure there is no one in detention who is not registered and maybe take a look at the detention rooms. That is the extent of a routine check," he said.

According to Penal Code article 127, government officials who torture or order the torture of a citizen are accountable before a criminal court. In the case of death, punishment could reach a life sentence. However, Barakat points out that the only entity with the authority to send the case to the courts is the technical office of the district prosecutor. "There have been hundreds of cases that have never been taken to court," he said, and the cases that do reach the courts usually suffer from inconclusive evidence.

What happened in Bilqass is an indication that all parties need to address the issue more seriously. In the meantime, the air remains heavy and the dust refuses to settle.

Peers before prosecution

To avoid sending more journalists to jail, as **Shaden Shehab** reports, the Press Syndicate's chairman and the prosecutor-general have agreed that all libel complaints should be scrutinised by the Syndicate before they are sent to court





Ragaa El-Arabi



Makram Mohamed Ahmed



Mahmoud El-Saadani



Said Abdel-Khaleq



Maher El-Guindi

Press Syndicate Chairman Makram Mohamed Ahmed succeeded last Sunday in striking a tentative deal with Prosecutor-general Ragaa El-Arabi. The two agreed that the Syndicate should be given the opportunity to settle libel complaints against journalists instead of sending them to court. Before the agreement was reached, readers filed their complaints with the prosecutor, who would decide whether the offending journalist would be put on trial. As a result, three journalists were sent to jail in less than a month and about 60 others are awaiting trial.

"This is a positive step. It should prove beneficial to readers and journalists alike," Ahmed told *Al-Ahram Weekly*. "The Syndicate will examine the complaints and, if the journalist is found guilty of libel, he will be obliged to publish a correction and an apology in the same newspaper. Then we will simply enforce the journalistic code of ethics."

Ahmed said that such a procedure would lessen the number of libel cases going to court, if not eliminate them altogether. "Naturally, if a reader refuses the Syndicate's intervention, no one can stop him from going to court, but we expect the readers to be more cooperative. After all, who wants to spend his time and money in courts?" Ahmed pointed out.

The Press Syndicate vowed to enforce a code of ethics following a meeting between President Hosni Mubarak and the Supreme Press Council, in which the president complained that some newspapers resorted to sensationalism in order to increase circulation. Mubarak, however, promised that no restrictions would be imposed on the freedom of the press, "other than those enshrined in law and in the journalist's conscience."

The code of ethics requires the Syndicate's council to examine readers' complaints. If a journalist is proven to have violated the code, he or she will face an investigative committee that must decide on his case in no more than 30 days. If found guilty, the journalist will face a disciplinary board that will decide the appropriate penalty. Punishments include a reprimand, to be followed, if necessary, by a fine, a one-year suspension from work in journalism, or expulsion from the Syndicate.

During the past two weeks, the Syndicate has received more than 100 complaints from readers. The most significant came from Giza Governor Maher El-Guindi, who accused the prominent columnist Mahmoud El-Saadani and Said Abdel-Khaleq, assistant chief editor of *Al-Wafd*, of slandering him. El-Guindi also filed a complaint with prosecutors, who heard his testimony and that of El-Saadani and decided to resume hearings on 4 May.

The Syndicate's investigative committee, however, found that Saadani and Abdel-Khaleq did not violate the code of ethics in their writings. A report by the committee, sent to El-Guindi, said the journalists had not exceeded the limits of permissible criticism, and their writings could not be viewed as libelous. "I hope El-Guindi is convinced and agrees to withdraw his complaint from the prosecutor's office," Ahmed said.

In another development, Ahmed said the prosecutor has agreed to file an appeal requesting a stay of execution on prison sentences passed against three journalists until the Court of Cassation rules on their cases. Ahmed has repeatedly asked the prosecutor to suspend one-year jail sentences passed on 24 February against Magdi Hussein, chief editor of *Al-Shaab*, the publication of the Islamist-oriented Labour party, and cartoonist Mohamed Hilal, as well as a six-month sentence passed on 18 March against Gamal Fahmi, managing editor of the weekly newspaper *Al-Destour*, until the Court of Cassation reaches a final verdict.

Hussein and Hilal were found guilty of slandering Alaa El-Alfi, son of former Interior Minister Hassan El-Alfi. Fahmi was found guilty of slandering writer Tharwat Abaza in an article which he published in the weekly newspaper *Al-Arabi*, mouthpiece of the Nasserist Party.

Attempts by the Syndicate and other mediators to reach out-of-court settlements between Hussein and El-Alfi, and also between Fahmi and Abaza, were said to be facing difficulties.

In the past two months, several measures have been taken to "bring the press to order". *Al-Destour* was banned and Adel Hammouda, deputy chief editor of *Rose El-Youssef* magazine, was re-assigned to *Al-Ahram*. Both *Al-Destour* and *Rose El-Youssef* had published a warning to Coptic businessmen, allegedly issued by the Gama'a Al-Islamiya.

The Investment Authority later prohibited publishing houses in duty-free zones from printing newspapers and magazines, thus forcing newspapers and magazines which publish on the authority of a foreign licence to print abroad.

What went wrong at Mina

Egyptian witnesses of the stampede at Mina say the tragedy was caused by large crowds crammed in a relatively small space. But, as **Ahmed Moussa** reports, time was another factor

According to official Saudi Arabian figures, last Thursday's stampede at Mina, near Mecca, killed 118 people, mostly Asians, and including two Egyptians. About 170 others were injured.

The stampede broke out towards the end of the *hajj*, or pilgrimage, when pilgrims on a bridge leading to pillars that symbolise Satan's temptations surged forward to perform a ritual known as "stoning the devil." The ritual is considered the most difficult part of the pilgrimage.

According to Mohamed Farid El-Sohagi, an Egyptian who was at the scene of the tragedy, thousands surged forward in groups, pushing and shoving those ahead of them. The reason for their hurry was that they believe they are required by the *Sunna* [the customs of the Prophet Mohamed] to "stone the devil" between noon and sunset. Many of them were eager to proceed to Mecca, the next stop in the *hajj*, before the sun set. [In Islam, emulating the ways of the Prophet Mohamed is recommendable but not obligatory].

"Before the stampede, thousands of pilgrims had to wait for hours for the stoning to begin," El-Sohagi said. "As soon as the time came, they all surged forward. The distance is only half a kilometre but it is so congested that you have to walk it in an hour and a half or two hours."

Samir Ibrahim, another Egyptian pilgrim, said that the insistence of the majority of the pilgrims to abide closely by the *Sunna* — although they are aware of possible dangerous consequences — is behind the tragedy. He noted that other pilgrims usually prefer to stone the devil by night when Mina, about seven kilometres from Mecca and surrounded by mountains, is not so crowded.

Yasser Abdel-Razek blamed the tragedy on the "provocative" behaviour of Asian pilgrims. "They surged forward in groups, pushing those ahead of them, and stepping over those sitting or lying on the ground, waiting for the stoning to begin," Abdel-Razek said. "As a result, many fell to their deaths from the bridge and others died in the stampede."

Magdi Mahmoud Wafa pointed to the fact that many of the victims were sitting on the ground along the way leading to the bridge as another reason for the disaster. Another problem, he added, was that many pilgrims had brought their luggage along with them because they wanted to proceed to Mecca immediately after the stoning. When the pushing and shoving began, the luggage fell, causing pilgrims to fall over each other, Wafa said.

Mahmoud El-Shazli noted that even after the stampede, crowds of pilgrims, wishing to perform the ritual, continued to advance forward. "This compounded the situation, until Saudi authorities managed to seal off the area completely in order to remove those who were killed or injured," he said.

Mohamed Youssef, an Egyptian pilgrim, said the stoning ritual needs to be regulated. "What is needed is a procedure similar to what travellers are required to do at airports," he said. "A traveller takes a certain route leading to the passport office and airport customs. There should be a certain route that must be taken by the pilgrim in order to avoid a repeat of such tragedies. A pilgrim should proceed along the bridge, then stone the devil and come down at the other end of the bridge. Pilgrims should be prohibited from sitting or lying down on the ground."

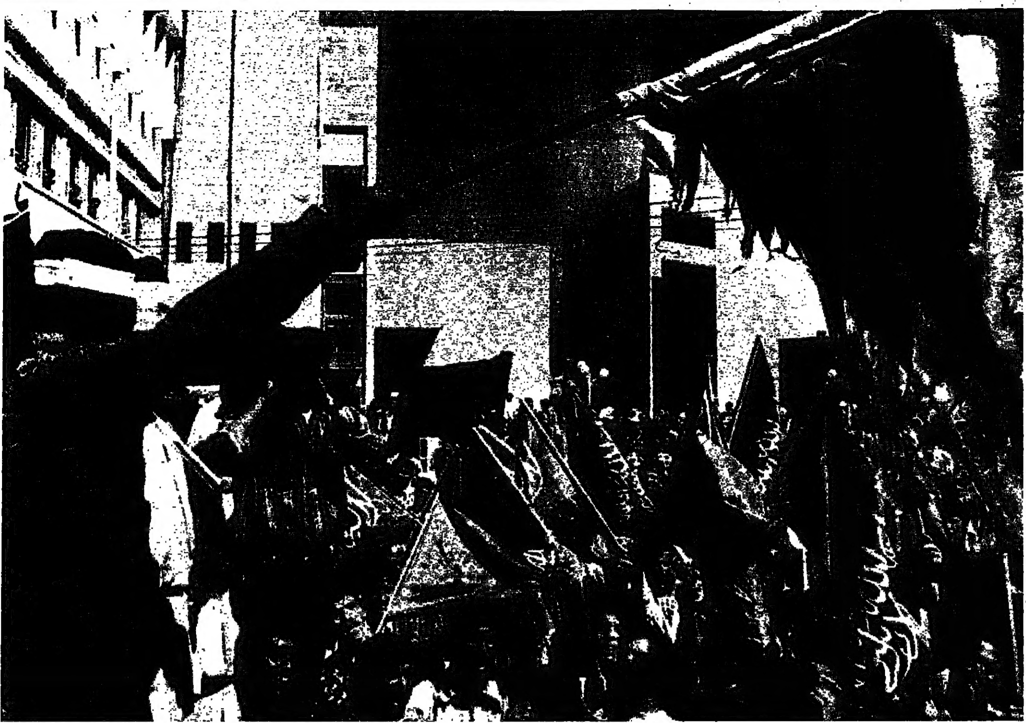
Recalling the moments of horror, Mohamed Abdel-Wahhab said thousands of Asian pilgrims were sitting or lying down along the way leading to the bridge. "They only left a 1.5-metre-wide path for the thousands of the other pilgrims walking toward the bridge. Although Saudi authorities broadcast appeals in various languages, asking them to move, they refused to budge. The reason is that they wanted to stay close to the site where the devil will be stoned, instead of coming all the way from their camps, which are located at distances ranging from two to four kilometres," Abdel-Wahhab said.

He went on: "I stopped 30 metres from the bridge. This is what saved my life. Most of those who were on the bridge or below it were either killed or injured."

Abdel-Azim Ahmed said only the quick intervention of Saudi rescue forces prevented an even bigger tragedy. More than 30 ambulances and a similar number of motorcycles carrying paramedics arrived quickly at the scene to remove dead bodies and the injured, he said. Helicopters hovered overhead to guide the ambulances and security forces to the site of the stampede. Motorcycles were used because they can manoeuvre into large crowds with relative ease.

Saudi Arabia had deployed tens of thousands of security forces during the *hajj* and spent billions of dollars on expanding shrines and infrastructure. A similar stampede in 1994 claimed the lives of some 270 pilgrims.

Edited by **Wadie Kirolos**



A Palestinian student burns an Israeli flag during a Hamas demonstration at the Al-Najah University in the West Bank town of Nablus on Saturday. Some 3,000 rallied calling for revenge against Israel over the recent murder of Hamas bomb-maker Mohieddin Al-Sharif *(photo: AFP)*

A Palestinian civil war?

An independent inquiry into the killing of Hamas military leader, Mohieddin Al-Sharif, maybe the only way to stave-off a devastating inter-Palestinian confrontation. Graham Usher writes from Jerusalem

Two weeks after Hamas military leader Mohieddin Al-Sharif was found dead beside a wrecked car in Ramallah, the political tremors caused by his death have yet to subside. But the contesting claims over who and what killed him have changed. If the initial stand-off was between the Palestinian Authority (PA) and Israel — which denied any involvement in Al-Sharif's death and warned that the PA would be responsible if any "terrorist action" resulted from it — the locus of the conflict is now between the PA and Hamas. For most Palestinians, this is a potentially far worse confrontation.

The conflict began with the PA's arrest of Hamas student leader, Ghassan Adassi, on 29 March, the night of the car explosion in Ramallah. One week later, the PA's West Bank security chief, Jibril Rajoub, announced that — based on testimony from Adassi and four other Hamas detainees — Al-Sharif's death was the result of "an internal feud" within Hamas, allegedly over Al-Sharif's leadership position and the allocation of funds to Hamas military arm, Izzadin El-Qassam. PA planning minister, Nabil Shaath, (who had earlier said that Israel was behind Al-Sharif's death) now declared that "Israel is not responsible for the operation." On Saturday, the PA arrested Emad Awadallah, another Qassam leader, in a café in Ramallah, announcing that he had shot Al-Sharif and then blew him up in a car to disguise his handiwork. The evidence for this was again Adassi's testimony.

The PA's account of Al-Sharif's death "satisfied" Israeli leaders like Defense Minister Yitzhak Mordechai, who said it showed that the PA was beginning to "understand more clearly the terrorist infrastructure and the weapons" that exist in the self-rule areas. But the PA's spin on the events infuriated Hamas.

"The PA's conclusions are not convincing to anyone in the Palestinian public and certainly not to the Hamas leadership," said Hamas's Gaza political spokesperson, Aziz Rantisi. "Hamas cannot take seriously a confession extracted from a suspect after extended interrogation," he said, implying that Adassi's testimony had been culled by torture. On the same day, Izzadin El-Qassam released a videocassette of a masked man who claimed to be Adel Awadallah, Emad's brother and Qassam's current West Bank leader. The man accused Jibril Rajoub of killing Al-Sharif, "in collaboration with Israel," vowing that Qassam would wreak "vengeance on the Zionist enemy." To make matters worse, on Sunday, Hamas released a letter, which it said was written by Adassi (the letter was actually typed), denying that he had any knowledge about Al-Sharif's death and that his confession had been forced out of him after "torture and threats that I had never experienced in my life."

In response to these and other statements, the PA hit back. It arrested Rantissi, "for attacking the PA," and closed down Reuters news agency's office in Gaza, presumably for receiving and broadcasting the Qassam videocassette. The PA also arrested around 14 Hamas students from Al-Najah University in Nablus for staging a pro-Hamas rally on campus on Saturday, "without PA permission." By Tuesday, some 44 Hamas figures had been arrested in the West Bank and Gaza, including Ibrahim Makadmeh, a former military leader who has since become perhaps the most important Hamas leader in the Gaza Strip. Nor was there any sign from the PA that the crackdown was about to stop. Addressing a special session of the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC), PA Presidential Secretary Tayeb Abdel-Rehim told reporters that "some people are trying to make it seem like the Palestinian people are on the verge of civil war. This has no basis in fact." But, he added, the PA "will not allow any internal power to practice a parallel authority or take the law into its own hands."

Most Palestinian observers, however, believe that there is precious little law about the PA's clampdown. The PA has so far allowed no independent corroboration of its version of Al-Sharif's death, other than to allow PLC member, Hatem Abdel-Qader, to meet with Adassi for a few minutes on Friday. Abdel-Qader said he saw no evidence of torture against Adassi and that the latter had told him he had confessed "without the threat of force". Even so, Abdel-Qader called for an "independent investigation committee" to be set up.

It was a line echoed at a meeting of 12 Palestinian factions, including Hamas and Yasser Arafat's Fatah movement, held in Gaza on Sunday. Urging calm, the factions called on Hamas to cooperate with the PA's investigation into Al-Sharif's death and to desist from making "inflammatory" statements. But it also called on the PA to release all Hamas political prisoners and engage in a "direct dialogue" with the Islamists to "strengthen the unity of the Palestinian national position against an Israeli government that seeks only to deny Palestinians' national rights."

It is a position that aptly expresses the main opinion among Palestinians, who are becoming less concerned about Al-Sharif's death than over preventing inter-Palestinian violence from erupting in the aftermath. Arafat has yet to respond to the factions' call or indeed make any statement about the Al-Sharif affair. But, if tensions are to be eased between the PA and Hamas, Arafat's intervention is vital. Having thrown the "ball into Hamas's court" by declaring that it was responsible for Al-Sharif's death, Arafat must now decide what kind of peace the PA will make with its Islamist opposition.

No strings in south Lebanon

Lebanese and Syrian leaders met this week to map out the next stage of their joint diplomatic offensive to counter Israel's efforts to attach conditions to a pullout from south Lebanon. Zeina Khodr reports from Beirut

The meeting between Syrian President Hafez Al-Assad and Lebanese President Elias El-Hrawi in Latakia on Monday took place as indications emerged that Washington is starting to take Israel's conditional offer to withdraw from south Lebanon seriously. The Israeli cabinet announced two weeks ago its acceptance of United Nations Resolution 425 which calls for immediate and unconditional withdrawal from south Lebanon. But Israel linked its withdrawal to starting talks with the Lebanese government over security arrangements in the area so as to guarantee Israel's northern border.

"The leaders of Syria and Lebanon discussed the Israeli manoeuvre and the danger to Lebanon and the peace process as a result of the conditions imposed by the Israeli government on a withdrawal from south Lebanon," Syrian presidential spokesman Jurban Kurieh said. "The Lebanese leadership said its people refuse to grant Israel security guarantees because security can only be guaranteed as part of a just and comprehensive peace."

US Secretary of State Madeline Albright has sent a written request to Lebanon that they "seriously" study the offer that has been made by the Israeli government. Albright described the offer as "sincere" and "in line with the Middle East peace process". The letter was delivered to Lebanon's Foreign Minister Fares Boueiz who was in Paris trying to drum up support for Beirut's position.

Boueiz rejected the request, reiterating that UN Resolution 425 called for an unconditional Israeli withdrawal. "The resolution is mandatory and Lebanon is not ready to negotiate the terms of its implementation," Boueiz was quoted as saying.

The deputy secretary-general at the Israeli Foreign Ministry, Yoav Biran, was quoted as saying US officials are softening their opinion concerning Israeli Defence Minister Yitzhak Mordechai's proposal to withdraw from Lebanon in exchange for security arrangements. Biran was recently in Washington as part of a media campaign launched by Israel to garner international support for the offer.

The head of the right-wing National Liberal Party, Dory Chamoun, was more blunt. "The Americans feel the Lebanese government should respond to the Israeli proposal and hold negotiations," Chamoun said in Beirut after touring the US, France and Brazil. "The Beirut government is making a big mistake by dismissing the Israeli proposal. It can profit from this proposal. Washington may use the withdrawal plan to resume the regional peace negotiations."

Syria's Defence Minister Mustafa Tlas, who paid a brief visit to northern Lebanon, accused Washington of attempting to coerce Beirut into accepting the Israeli proposal in a bid to drive a wedge between Lebanon and Syria who at present coordinate their peacemaking efforts.

"They are trying to split apart the two negotiating tracks," Tlas added. "But the leaders of both countries have thwarted this attempt."

Syrian and Lebanese leaders met in the Syrian port city of Latakia to discuss Albright's message and the growing international support for Israel's conditional withdrawal plan.

Israel is also trying to rally UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan's support, particularly after the head of the world body said, "UN resolutions require the parties to negotiate and make compromises".

The Israeli government sent a letter to Annan stating "Israel accepted 425" and that "Israel would leave Lebanon with appropriate security arrangements so the Lebanese government can restore its effective control over southern Lebanon and assume responsibility for its territory".

Lebanon's Defence Minister Mohsen Dalloul asserted that introducing changes into UN resolutions in this way could create a dangerous precedent. "This will make other countries ask for the amendment of resolutions that do not meet with their approval. No one has the right to speak on our behalf on 425 and 426. Annan must understand this is a dangerous game which will reflect badly on his credibility and that of the international organisation," Dalloul was quoted as saying.

But Chamoun believes resolutions 425 and 426 allowed for the possibility of negotiations between the two countries so as to reach a settlement in the south. "Lebanon should use this possibility to its own advantage," he added.

Lebanon and its close ally Syria have received backing from France, the Arab League and Egypt over the last week. Reports say that Paris is drawing up its own initiative to resume the stalled peace talks.

France had voiced unequivocal support for the joint Lebanese-Syrian rejection of the so-called "security for peace deal". Syria's Vice President Abdel-Halim Khaddam and Foreign Minister Farouk Al-Sharaa held talks with French President Jacques Chirac in Paris. Elysée officials said France continues to back the unconditional implementation of Resolution 425 within the framework of a global arrangement. But media reports say French officials are considering expanding the role of the five-nation cease-fire monitoring group which was set up in April 1996 to oversee the truce between Lebanon and Israel in south Lebanon. The reports said France wants the group to play a more important role and possibly discuss security issues between the two countries. The group comprises military officials representing Lebanon, Syria, Israel, France and the United States. But expanding the role of the group is an old suggestion which has already been rejected by Beirut and Damascus.

The Arab League's Secretary General Esmat Abdel-Meguid, who visited Beirut last week, backed Lebanon's position. "I was Egypt's ambassador to the UN when 425 was issued 20 years ago. It is explicit and must be implemented by Israel. The proposal is a manoeuvre aimed at sowing discord between Lebanon and Syria and emptying Resolution 425 of its content. Our political position is clear and that is to support Lebanon so that the resolution is implemented without conditions," he added after talks with Prime Minister Rafik Al-Hariri.

Egypt's President Hosni Mubarak also telephoned his Lebanese counterpart Elias El-Hrawi to express his support for Beirut's position vis-à-vis the Israeli offer. Mubarak said he would visit Beirut soon.

Despite international pressure, Beirut and Damascus are unlikely to budge. Lebanon has made clear security cannot be guaranteed without a comprehensive peace. "We will cooperate with Israel in all fields including security, if a peace treaty is forged between Israel, Syria and Lebanon," Hariri said. Damascus has also agreed to support the Israeli proposal only if talks resume on the fate of the Golan Heights at the point where they broke off two years ago.

In the interim, there are fears Israel may step up its attacks in south Lebanon as its only means of pressuring Lebanon into accepting its conditional withdrawal offer.

All change in Rabat

Amid great expectations for reform, the Moroccan parliament held its first session this week since the election of former opposition figure Abdel-Rahman Al-Youssoufi as prime minister. Anissa K'ahl-Laayoun reports from Rabat

Nearly two months have passed since Moroccan Prime Minister Abdel-Rahman Al-Youssoufi was charged by King Hassan to form a new government. Most observers interpreted the appointment of the former opposition figure as an indication of King Hassan's willingness to change, to reform the state and, in the future, to enforce democracy and human rights in Morocco.

So far, Al-Youssoufi's appointment has been warmly received throughout both Moroccan society and the international community. US President Bill Clinton and Secretary of State Madeleine Albright have both expressed Washington's support for the new government in its attempt to build up both democracy and civil society in Morocco. Arab and Islamic countries have also welcomed Al-Youssoufi's election.

Yet experts on Morocco believe that many obstacles stand in the way of fulfilling hopes for an effective reform strategy which would reforge trust between the government and opposition groups.

The first obstacle facing Al-Youssoufi was to compose an integrated government that would be truly representative of the country's fragmented political topography. Another difficulty stems from the fact that what Morocco is now going through is a totally new experience. For the first time in recent history, members of the former government who used to control all aspects of decision-making find themselves sitting in the opposition camp. Meanwhile, the present government is formed of key opposition parties who have no experience of wielding power. This has led many to question their ability to manage public affairs and to tackle such important issues as improving economic performance and solving the problem of rising unemployment. According to official figures, 18 per cent of Moroccans, many of them university graduates, are jobless.

The former opposition groups must now try to turn their rhetoric and political platforms into concrete action. They must do this while maintaining the support of the monarchy, the parliamentary majority and public opinion.

On the institutional level, the accumulation of more than four decades of faulty management of public affairs, marked by corruption and the abuse of governmental, parliamentary and communal powers for the sake of individual interests and clientship, have resulted in a culture in which the various administrations and institutions compete with one another instead of cooperating.

It is to try and break out of this situation that the new government has oriented its action toward a comprehensive, rather than a sectorial, view by focusing on urgent matters. Prime Minister Al-Youssoufi's plans in this respect will be clarified in his declaration on the general policy of the government which he is due to make before parliament next week.

The motto of the new government is "change, harmonisation for democracy, economic development and social solidarity." Moroccans expect such slogans to be reflected in social policies aimed at building the welfare state and helping the unprivileged and the handicapped. Moreover, there are many realities, such as the gap between the different social classes and the various regions of Morocco, the decline in living and educational standards, and widespread corruption and abuse of power, which cannot be faced head on without a thorough reassessment of the past.

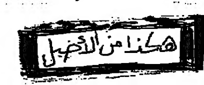
Steps taken so far by Prime Minister Al-Youssoufi indicate that he is serious in trying to honour the promises he made while campaigning for election.

The first decree issued by Al-Youssoufi following his appointment was to increase customs duties on wheat imports so as to protect the farmers who make up the majority of Morocco's population.

His next step was to ask all ministers and public officials to declare their wealth and properties. This move was welcomed by Moroccans who have long complained of the mismanagement, misappropriation and general waste of public funds.

One issue, however, which does not seem to be a subject of controversy, whether the prime minister in office belongs to the former government or the former opposition, is that of the Western Sahara. All Moroccan parties have agreed on the necessity of going ahead with the United Nations-sponsored referendum to determine the future of the region. Morocco insists the Sahara is part of its territory, but local tribes under the banner of the Polisario have been fighting for decades for an independent state.

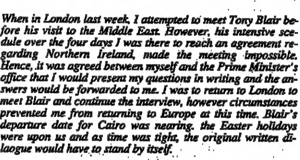
Amidst so many great hopes and so many awkward realities, what is needed most is an atmosphere of trust, understanding and dialogue. That perhaps is why one of Al-Youssoufi's first decisions after taking office was to appoint a government spokesman to establish a forum for communication and dialogue between the decision-makers and public opinion.





In the spirit of Madrid

On the eve of his first visit to the region as Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, Tony Blair replied to written questions from *Al-Ahram* Editor-in-Chief, **Ibrahim Nafie**, on the future of the Middle East peace process and the prospects for Anglo-Egyptian relations



When in London last week, I attempted to meet Tony Blair before his visit to the Middle East. However, his intensive scedule over the four days I was there to reach an agreement regarding Northern Ireland, made the meeting impossible. Hence, it was agreed between myself and the Prime Minister's office that I would present my questions in writing and the answers would be forwarded to me. I was to return to London to meet Blair and continue the interview, however circumstances prevented me from returning to Europe at this time. Blair's departure date for Cairo was nearing, the Easter holidays were upon us and as time was tight, the original written dilaogue would have to stand by itself.

Prime Minister, last month you launched a round of intense diplomatic activity. It started with letters to Clinton, Arafat and Netanyahu and subsequently you met with Netanyahu. What lay behind these efforts?

Helping to achieve progress in the Middle East Peace Process is a key priority for our Presidency of the European Union. We are deeply concerned that the spirit of Madrid and Oslo has evaporated, and that the promise of those agreements has not been fulfilled. When I visit the region this week I will be doing so not just as the British Prime Minister but as the Presidency of the European Union with Europe.

We need to "kick start" the process. Last month, Robin Cook visited Israel, the Occupied Territories, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan and Egypt. The EU Special Envoy, Miguel Moratinos, and Presidency officials are currently in the region to follow up his visit to prepare the ground for mine in the next few days.

I believe that the EU should have a role that reflects its economic contribution to the peace process and the historical ties and strong modern interests that bind our two regions together. But this role must also be complementary to that of the United States.

You succeeded through your Presidency of the EU in obtaining recognition from the US that Europe is a full partner in the Middle East Peace Process, not simply a party whose efforts have to complement those of the US. Now we have heard from the American side that there is a chance they may withdraw from the peace process. How do you evaluate such a possibility, and if this occurs, do you think that Europe could contime alone with its peace efforts?

Because I have been so involved recently in trying to sort out an agreement on the future of Northern Ireland, I have been in regular contract with Bill Clinton, and of course we have also discussed the Middle East Peace Process. I know from these discussions that the US are frustrated that a breakthrough has not yet been achieved and that is a feeling we all share. But I do not have the impression that they are about to disengage.

The EU has made it very clear that it supports the current US initiative on redeployment. The Americans are best placed to take a lead in this way and we have been encouraging them to come forward with specific proposals.

As I said, the EU can complement and reinforce their role. We will continue to back up our diplomacy with financial support. The EU is by far the largest provider of aid to the Palestinians and, under the UK Presidency, we recently agreed to extend this aid package beyond its expiry date at the end of 1998.

Your Foreign Secretary, Mr Robin Cook, faced a campaign of savage denunciations from the Israeli side as a result both of his meeting with a Palestinian official at Har Homa and of his aside to an Israeli official that "Jerusalem is a capital for the Palestinians as well as the Israelis." Can you, Prime Minister, confirm whether or not this position is the official British one as endorsed by the members of the EU?

Robin Cook is an immensely able Foreign Secretary, for whom I have the highest regard, and I know that opinion is shared by our colleagues throughout Europe. The EU's position on settlements and on Jerusalem have not changed and are naturally shared by Britain. While I understand the sensitivity of Har Homa, for both sides, I want to look forward now and see how progress can be made.

Your government offered a very promising incentive to break the deadlock in the Middle East peace process, but the Israel side refused to take it. Does that refusal limit your efforts in the Middle East and to what extent?

If we are to make progress in the Middle East Peace Process, it is important that we move away from a climate of blame and mutual recrimination. As I say, we should look forward, not back. This is why we are now working on ways in which the EU can help break the current deadlock.

The lessons of history warn against excessive optimism, but I hope to use my visit in particular to take forward ideas on the interim economic issues. There is real frustration that despite the EU's very substantial investment in these projects, they remain blocked. We are regularly told that very little separates the sides, at least in so far as the airport and Gaza Industrial Estate are concerned.

Clearly it is vital that there should be no delay on the wider issues of land for peace covered by the US initiatives. But I want to be sure that we are ready to move forward with these vital confidence-building measures.

Britain has said that it will host a conference to discuss humanitarian issues in Iraq. Don't you agree, Prime Minister, that lifting the ban on Iraq would be a more effective policy in humanitarian terms, especially once the UN inspectors have finished their work at the Presidential sites?

I don't think anybody should be in any doubt as to who is responsible for any humanitarian suffering in Iraq. The solution to sanctions lies in Saddam Hussein's hands. We do not want sanctions to remain in place a day longer than necessary. But only when Iraq complies with the relevant UN Security Council resolutions can the process of lifting sanctions begin.

The UN Resolution drafted by the UK and adopted at the end of the recent crisis made this clear. The fact is that it is Iraq's failure to comply with its obligations which has delayed the moment when action can be taken on sanctions. If Iraq now cooperates with UNSCOM and answers the outstanding questions, as provided for in the UN Secretary General's Memorandum of Understanding, that process can begin.

In the meantime we are very concerned to make sure that the humanitarian needs of the Iraqi people are fully met. I will take no lectures from anyone on this. It is the British government that sponsored the oil for food resolution. It is the British government that is holding the EU meeting on humanitarian assistance to Iraq.

Is there any evidence to support recent claims that Iraq might be planning to flood Britain with duty-free goods containing anthrax?

I do not want to talk about intelligence matters, but it is true that on a precautionary basis the British Government circulated a warning to UK ports on the possible risk of anthrax or other biological agents being smuggled into the UK. Although there was no actual evidence of smuggling, all such reports have to be taken seriously because of Iraq's chemical and biological weapons capability, and its past record of using chemical weapons.

It is our concern at this capability that lies at the root of our support for UNSCOM's work in Iraq.

From the British point of view, how would you evaluate Mr Netanyahu's insistence on beginning with the Lebanese track, and his reasons for choosing this particular moment to declare that he intends to implement UNSC Resolution 425, 20 years after it was issued?

You should ask Mr. Netanyahu and the Israeli Cabinet why they have chosen to signal their willingness to withdraw from South Lebanon at this time. We would, however, be pleased to see an Israeli withdrawal in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 425. We welcome the Israeli government's decision as a positive step in that direction.

The Resolution does not, of course, provide for conditions to be attached. Nevertheless, I welcome Prime Minister Hariri's statement that the Lebanese authorities would naturally assume the normal security responsibilities of any state over territory it controlled.

Lebanon is a key concern for us. But clearly all this would be easier if there were also progress towards a comprehensive settlement, particularly on the Syrian track.

Do you think it is possible to stop violence from escalating further in the occupied lands? Do you see Israel's hardline positions as helping to achieve a minimum degree of stability there, while the Palestinians are left facing the perennial accusation that they are reluctant to police the areas under their authority?

One thing I have repeatedly made clear is our commitment to Israel's security. Robin Cook emphasised during his visit that we expect 100 per cent commitment on the part of the Palestinian Authority to the security effort. This is one of the key foundations for a lasting peace.

We want to help the Palestinians with their task — we know from our own experience in Northern Ireland how difficult it can be to stop extremists who seek to disrupt the search for peace.

The EU already provides finance, expertise and equipment to help the Palestinians to develop their counter-terrorism capability and enable them to fight terror more effectively.

During my visit, I hope we will be able to finalise arrangements for a mechanism to formalise EU/Palestinian security cooperation.

Prime Minister, may I raise the question of Britain's obstinacy in continuing to issue visas to certain Egyptian Islamic militants? Do you consider the recent decision to turn down applications from militants wishing to attend a conference in the UK to constitute a turning point in Britain's attitudes towards Egyptian terrorists living in London, including those who have been sentenced in absentia? We have also heard a lot about proposed legislation being prepared by your Home Secretary, Jack Straw. The bill would be intended to strengthen the legal instruments available to counter terrorist actions planned or incited on British territory and give the police wider powers to control and monitor fund-raising activities. When do you expect this bill will be brought forward?

Wherever we have sufficient evidence to frustrate terrorism, or support for terrorism, we take action. There were reports linking this conference to the Gama'at Al-Islamiya (GI). It was for this reason that we refused visas to individuals seeking to attend. We would take the same action again in similar circumstances.

We remain determined that the UK should not be used as a base for terrorism overseas in any way. The Home Secretary will be publishing shortly a consultation paper with proposals for strengthening our counter-terrorism laws. The legislation to which you refer will probably be brought forward during the next session of Parliament.

How do you react to Mr Netanyahu's statements during his last European tour condemning Europe for the colonial perceptions which still pervade her treatment of the Middle East?

During his last visit to London, Prime Minister Netanyahu told me personally that he welcomed European involvement in the Middle East Peace Process, and I have no reason to doubt that. We will be discussing all these issues when we meet in the next few days, and shall do so in a spirit of cooperation and knowing that we can talk to each other very openly.

"In the past few years, Egypt has transformed itself in the eyes of the business world. The economic reform programme has achieved a Renaissance which most finance ministers only dream of. Britain is a major stakeholder in this transformation."

Your position against Iraq before Saddam Hussein complied with UN demands was met with reservations by the Arab world. Do you think that Britain will be able to restore its image in the region quickly?

Our key objective in the Middle East is to promote peace and stability. We went to great lengths during the crisis to share our thoughts with our friends in the Arab world. The role played by President Mubarak was extremely important.

Our preference was always for a diplomatic solution. But, as Kofi Annan made clear, it was diplomacy backed by the threat of force that finally made possible a positive outcome. That outcome now needs to be tested in practice and it is important that we should not drop our guard.

How do you evaluate the theories of some pundits concerning Israel's assassination attempt on Khalid Masha'al and their threats to do the same again. Do you not feel that this deserves to be classed as state terrorism and that Israel should in fact be seen as the only state in our region that is actively destabilising the situation there?

We said very clearly at the time of the assassination attempt on Misha'al that we unequivocally condemn all forms of extra-judicial assassination. The need to fight terrorism and protect the lives of innocent civilians, pressing though it may be, can never be a justification for resorting to such methods.

We also made very clear to the Israeli government our condemnation of the attack and our concern about the likely effects on Israel's relations with her neighbours and on efforts to get the peace process back on track.

But it would be counterproductive for Israel to be isolated. Israel is involved in the peace process laid down at Madrid and Oslo, based on UN Security Council Resolutions. Despite the present difficulties, negotiations continue. Our efforts must go into sustaining these negotiations, which offer the best prospects of securing a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

How do you evaluate relations between Egypt and the UK in the spheres of the economy, politics, defence and culture?

In the last few years, Egypt has transformed itself in the eyes of the business world. The economic reform programme has achieved a renaissance which most Finance Ministers only dream of.

Through our strong and growing economic and commercial ties with Egypt, Britain is a major stakeholder in this transformation. We invest more in Egypt than any non-Arab country except America. Many of the big names of British business such as Glaxo-Welcome, British Gas and Marks and Spencers are established there, and others are looking to follow. Trade is growing: British firms exported 16 per cent more to Egypt last year than in 1996. The financial institutions of the City of London are among the most important investors in a revitalised Egyptian Stock Market. On Saturday I will be launching the Egypt/Britain Business Council in Cairo. This will cement our commercial partnership with Egypt and bring together British and Egyptian businessmen at the highest level.

The British and Egyptian armed forces also enjoy a close relationship. Egypt has a key position in the region, given its military capabilities, position as a leader of the Arab world, and its strategically vital geographical position. Our forces have a good record of cooperation, highlighted last autumn during Exercise Bright Star 97, which was of course hosted by Egypt.

But Britain's relations with Egypt go much deeper than this. They start, as they should, at the level of ordinary people — through education, through culture and through visitors in both directions — over 350,000 British tourists last year. Some 30,000 Egyptians live in Britain. A similar number visit us each year. Through our Cheving Scholarship programme, some 50 of Egypt's brightest graduates come to study in Britain each year. Many more do so independently. Others are following British Programmes in Egypt: every year the British Council registers some 18,000 students. And many British Muslims go to Egypt to study at the world-renowned University of Al-Azhar.

Taken together, these links — as partners in the pursuit of regional peace, in business, and in each other's daily lives — explain why Egypt matters to Britain, and Britain matters to Egypt. And so I am looking forward to my first ever visit to Egypt.

Egypt has a high consideration for the assistance your country has given us with problems over exports to Europe, in particular concerning potatoes and textiles, as well as for your help in achieving the partnership agreement between Europe and Egypt. As holders of the EU Presidency, how do you see the prospects for our mutual relations in the coming years?

As Presidency of the EU, Britain is determined to develop the EU's relationship with Egypt as one of our key economic partners in the Mediterranean region. If at all possible we have to bring the process of negotiating a new Association Agreement to a successful conclusion. The Agreement will move our relationship to a new level and bring very real economic benefits to both sides, as well as providing for closer political dialogue.

Ireland rising?

Northern Ireland had a happy Easter, but when the celebrations die down, will the war still be over? Gavin Bowd in London assesses the weight of history to be shouldered by the "men of the future"

When, last Friday, politicians signed an agreement on the future of Northern Ireland, it was hailed by a media fanfare. Its contents — the creation of a Northern Irish Assembly, a power-sharing executive and a cross-border body; the abandonment of the Irish republic's territorial claim on Northern Ireland — were seen as achieving the impossible, putting an end to 30 years of troubles which claimed 3,500 lives, and centuries of bitter conflict between Protestant and Catholic, British and Irish.

As the chairman of the negotiations, George Mitchell, the British prime minister, Tony Blair, and his Irish counterpart, Bertie Ahern, left Belfast, they received fulsome praise for their human and political qualities, and were even tipped to follow Yitzhak Rabin in winning the Nobel Peace Prize. But, in the cold light of day, what are the real chances of an end to the conflict in Northern Ireland?

In favour of the success of the agreement, it must firstly be pointed out that it was reached by all the main parties in Northern Ireland, with the exception of the intransigent Democratic Unionists of Rev. Ian Paisley. The representatives of the main paramilitary groups, Loyalist and Republican, have signed up, thus committing themselves to decommissioning their weapons over the next two years. The rapid release of convicted men and women of violence may appease the extremists. In broader terms, opinion polls indicate that the agreement will be ratified by nearly two-thirds of the electorates concerned, both North and South, at the referendum planned for May. Friday's agreement would therefore seem to have created a solid consensus for democratic politics in Northern Ireland.

That said, it should be remarked that a majority of Northern Irish people have always condemned terrorist actions, and voted for parties committed to peaceful means: the men and women of violence always belonged to fanaticised minorities on both sides of the sectarian divide. And even if Sinn Fein, the main paramilitary representative, has signed up to the agreement, it is difficult to see how such an agreement can promise both the preservation of the United Kingdom and the creation of a United Ireland.

The Official Unionist leader, David Trimble, has scored a significant success in getting Sinn Fein and the Irish government to accept in principle that the future of Northern Ireland should be decided by its people alone. Nevertheless, the prospect of a cross-border body, and of early release of IRA members, are causing significant disquiet among Unionists: the DUP is resolutely opposed, as are the majority of Official Unionist MPs and a substantial minority of its executive. The Loyalist Volunteer Force look unlikely to stop its bloody reprisals for the recent murder of its leader, Billy Wright.

And the problems are potentially even greater on the Republican side. The Sinn Fein leaders, Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness, have effectively recognised the partition of Ireland. It will be difficult to sell the Sinn Fein/IRA membership such a historic concession to Unionism, as well as a cross-border body which will have little more in its remit than tourism and the future of Irish pig-farming. Already, there are intelligence reports of serious internal feuding in the republican ranks.

The IRA has said no more than that it will examine the agreement carefully, and reach a judgement on the basis of how far it brings them closer to their goal of a 'democratic socialist republic of Ireland'. Sinn Fein/IRA may well lose a substantial number of activists to hardline splinter groups such as Republican Sinn Fein and the 32-County Sovereignty Committee, led by the sister of hunger strike 'martyr' Bobby Sands.

Events next weekend should already provide a good idea of the prospects of success for the Stormont agreement. David Trimble must consult and win the support of his members' conference. Gerry Adams, similarly, faces a testing time at the annual Sinn Fein congress.

It is, sadly, all too easy to imagine the many potential booby-traps, both literal and figurative, on the path to a lasting settlement in Northern Ireland: conflicting interpretations of the agreement will sow distrust on both sides: terrorist attacks and the release of notorious terrorists into the community will provoke a spiral of reprisals; steps towards the promised decommissioning of weapons may fail to convince many Northern Irish people; the summer marching season will bring its load of sectarian flashpoints. At a deeper level, it is difficult to see how lasting agreement can be reached between the protagonists.

The Easter weekend was not only marked by plaudits for the negotiators of Stormont. It also witnessed sectarian parades and the festival of religious bigotry that is the traditional football match between 'Protestant' Rangers and 'Catholic' Celtic in Glasgow, Scotland, to which many young Ulstermen made the pilgrimage.

On Friday, Tony Blair spoke lyrically of men of the 'future' replacing men of 'history', and of the 'normalisation' of Ulster politics. But the weight of Irish history should never be treated lightly. Gerry Adams is all too aware of the fate of Michael Collins, who negotiated the partition agreement of 1921 and was assassinated by the IRA for his pains. The Republican ranks will want to honour the memory of Wolfe Tone's United Irishmen and the 1798 uprising. The Protestant mentality bristles with distrust of Dublin and London, not to mention the nationalist population in its midst.

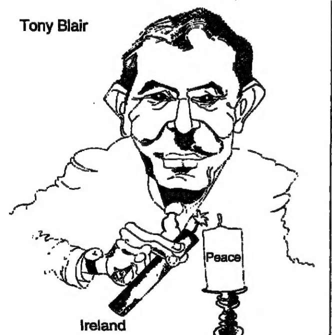
In the mid-seventies, another much-landed accord on power-sharing, the Sunningdale Agreement, foundered on the rocks of mutual hatred. And in a land where flags and emblems carry such deadly importance, it is difficult to see Unionists accepting peacefully their demographic eclipse by the Catholics of the North.

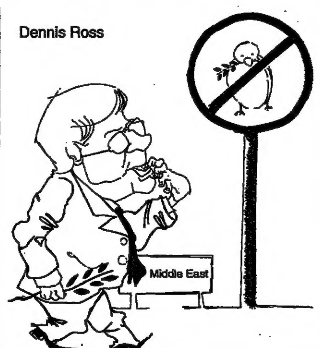
So will the new millennium see the end of the border, or the fight for a new partition?

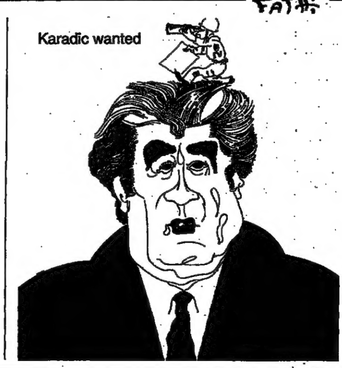


Copies of the agreement upon which hinges the prospects of peace in Northern Ireland *(photo: AFP)*

FATHI







Nukes well into the 21st century

Israel stands to gain from disarmament convention doings, writes Gamil Ibrahim from Geneva

The nuclear superiority of the five nuclear powers — the United States, Britain, France, Russia and China — will continue well into the 21st century. Those countries such as Israel, India and Pakistan that had built up a nuclear arsenal covertly and outside of all regulatory channels stand to gain.

In spite of over a year and a half of efforts in the UN disarmament convention in Geneva, the Group of 21 (G-21) which took part in the convention failed to reach an agreement with the five nuclear powers over a timetable for eliminating nuclear weapons by the year 2020. The five countries also refused to create a nuclear disarmament committee in the convention that would give this issue the international priority it merits.

The Egyptian ambassador to the United Nations in Geneva, Munir Zahran, outlined Egypt's position. "Egypt," he said, "has devoted considerable attention to the question of nuclear disarmament in the world and, in particular, to making the Middle East an area free of weapons of mass destruction. Egypt has been keen to press for a comprehensive and balanced agenda for the disarmament convention that would reflect the priorities of the international community in accordance with the pertinent UN General Assembly resolutions. Group-21 did, indeed, pass such an agenda last June. The agenda is an expression of the international community's sense of urgency with regard to devising a timetable for the phased elimination of nuclear weapons in the world that would be binding on all nuclear powers."

Unfortunately, negotiations between G-21 and the five nuclear powers failed to produce tangible results. In order to rescue the convention from failure, a settlement was reached in which some of the demands of the non-nuclear nations were given some consideration — in theory at least. To extricate the convention from its stalemate on this issue by generating some level of consensus, Egypt grudgingly agreed to appoint a special coordinator to negotiate with the delegations of the member nations over the manner in which the convention should handle the issue of nuclear disarmament. Zahran said that the proposal is impractical in the absence of the necessary political will among the five nuclear powers, which oppose using the disarmament convention as a negotiating forum for nuclear disarmament.

While G-21 failed in its goal to create a special nuclear disarmament committee and to generate practical progress towards a timetable for phased nuclear disarmament, the participants nevertheless succeeded in putting forward the issue of the security guarantees that nuclear nations should provide to the non-nuclear nations which are party to the Treaty for the Prevention of the Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

Egypt welcomed the formation of a special security guarantees committee. Zahran affirmed that this committee should speed serious negotiations within the framework of the disarmament convention over a legally-binding, multilateral accord that should provide a comprehensive set of security guarantees for the non-nuclear countries. G-21 participants believe that it is essential that the multilateral agreement over security guarantees be accorded the status of an "international covenant" drawn up in accordance with Article 6 of the nuclear non-proliferation treaty.

Although the five major nuclear powers have issued statements to the UN Security Council to the effect that they will not use their nuclear weapons against the nations which are party to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, such statements are not legally-binding. Moreover, many are watered down by contingent stipulations.

It is worthy of note in this context that the statement presented by the US ambassador to the UN, representing the US, France and Britain, contains unsatisfactory interpretations of the concept of reaching an agreement over security guarantees. He said that such an instrument would apply to those areas that are free of nuclear weapons. Zahran asserted that Egypt disagrees with this interpretation. The US ambassador's statement does not bode well, he said, as it suggests that the nuclear powers only agreed to create the committee for security guarantees as a manoeuvre designed to appease the non-nuclear nations and that they are not earnest in their desire to reach a legally binding, multilateral agreement.

Deliberations over the past year and a half have revealed that the nuclear powers, particularly the US and Russia, believe that the question of nuclear disarmament should be treated at the bilateral level. They hold that bilateral negotiations produced the *Start 1* and *Start 2* agreements which provide for comprehensive nuclear arms reductions in preparation for Start 3. The US representative to the convention has repeatedly stated that the question of nuclear disarmament is a complex and highly technical issue that is better left to direct negotiations between those parties that possess nuclear arsenals. The disarmament convention, he says, is not an appropriate forum to discuss such intricate matters.

Western countries in general hold that the elimination of land-mines, rather than nuclear weapons, should receive the priority attention of the disarmament convention. At the same time, however, they refuse to commit themselves to the removal of the mines they have planted in many parts of the world, particularly in the Middle East and especially in Egypt, during the two world wars. Zahran has stated that those nations that planted land-mines in the territories of other nations during periods of foreign occupation should be responsible for the removal of the mines. Moreover, he said, given the relatively low costs of the process, in comparison to the costs of nuclear arms reductions, they should also bear the entire cost of the removal, while observing the national security requirements of the countries in which the mines are located.

The disarmament convention is due to reconvene in Geneva next month. We can anticipate that the nuclear powers will continue to evade their obligations in accordance with the UN General Assembly resolutions. We can also expect them to continue to render interpretations of these resolutions in a manner intended to entrench their nuclear superiority for the next century. The only beneficiaries of this situation will be nations, such as Israel, that have violated international law by obtaining nuclear weapons without openly declaring them.

Yeltsin's baby rejected, for the moment

Russian President Boris Yeltsin has failed to browbeat the Russian parliament into submission, writes Abdel-Malek Khalil from Moscow. But the battle isn't over yet

Described as "baby-faced" and "apolitical", Russian President Boris Yeltsin's candidate for prime minister, 35-year-old political neophyte Sergei Kiriyenko, was roundly rejected last Friday by the *Duma* — the Lower House of parliament. Defeated by 186 votes to 143, Kiriyenko would have needed another 83 votes to obtain the majority required for confirmation in the 450-seat *Duma*.

Although the opposition as a whole bragged about having put the brakes on Yeltsin's machinations and the liberal Yabloko Party described the results as a "slap in the face" for the president, both Yeltsin and his protégé seemed to take the vote in their stride. Yeltsin's spokesman, Sergei Yastrzhembsky, said that the outcome was "in line with our expectations", and an unruffled Kiriyenko declined to admit defeat, claiming that he had expected even less support on his first confirmation round.

The Russian president, who had stunned the whole country — including his political inner circle — by dismissing his entire cabinet on 23 March, while asking Energy Minister Kiriyenko to form a new cabinet, effectively holds the power to dissolve the *Duma* and call for new elections if his choice of a premier is rejected three times in a row.

Working hard to promote his inexperienced and unknown candidate for the country's second top job, Yeltsin boasted that his man was a "professional manager who can work as part of a team, who shuns self-promotion and cheap populism." In the same breath, Yeltsin maintained that he would remain firm in his stand, categorically ruling out the designation of an alternative candidate. Sternly remonstrating with opposition deputies in the *Duma*, Yeltsin told them in no uncertain terms to make up their minds to Kiriyenko or face the consequences, "because I have no other candidate. I will not present another candidate."

Many observers believe that the Russian president's refusal to budge on Kiriyenko has degenerated into a political showdown, in some ways comparable to the October 1993 confrontation when Yeltsin used tanks to oust his enemies in the legislature. "Yeltsin's insistence on Kiriyenko is a matter of principle now," said Yevgeny Volk, an analyst at the Heritage Foundation in Moscow, explaining that "he wants to emphasise his superior position in the Russian political system."

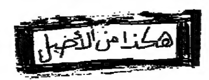
Despite Yeltsin's threat of ultimately dissolving the parliament in order to have his way, the opposition appeared unabashed — at least for the moment. Ultra-nationalist Vladimir Zhirinovsky of the Liberal Democratic Party derisively dismissed Kiriyenko for his youth and lack of political finesse. "You can't turn a first grader into an academician, or make a sergeant a marshal, otherwise there will be failure and destruction," fumed Zhirinovsky, who only changed his stand on Yeltsin's protégé after his party failed to manoeuvre its way into Kiriyenko's cabinet-in-the-making.

Less opportunistic, but nevertheless cautious, the Communist Party which heads the majority leftist coalition in the *Duma* used the political upheaval as a forum against Yeltsin's ill-fated economic course — after Yeltsin ruled out Communist demands to form a coalition government. Rejecting Kiriyenko's candidacy on the strength of his reformist free market politics, Communist Party leader Gennady Zyuganov explained that the party's vote against the premier-designate should be seen in the context of the general political crisis — including Yeltsin's disastrous reform programmes and the government's perennial failure to pay their workers' salaries.

But beyond the opposition's rhetoric, many analysts believe that the Russian president will ultimately win the next round. Although Yeltsin will definitely not allow Kiriyenko to include Communists in the new cabinet, it is most likely that he will make concessions to the right wing and sway the voting bloc of Vladimir Zhirinovsky's Liberal Democratic Party — or some other faction — in his candidate's favour.

In firm control of the reformist and market-oriented Kiriyenko, who vowed to "listen only to the president", once he has beaten the *Duma* into submission, Yeltsin stands to emerge stronger than ever, having proven his political prowess one more time.

Edited by **Gamal Nkrumah**



هكذا من الأصل

Remembering Deir Yassin

50 Years of dispossession

Fifty years after Deir Yassin, and in the midst of a dying peace process, the Zionists of America are denying historical facts so as to continue to deny justice to the Palestinians. **James Zogby** writes

This is an article I never thought I would have to write. It was 50 years ago that the Zionist terrorist groups Irgun and Lehi (Stern Gang) committed a massacre in the Arab village of Deir Yassin. Now, 50 years later, the president of the Zionist Organisation of America (ZOA), Morton Klein, is waging a campaign in the United States denying that a massacre took place.

Not unlike the historical revisionists who deny the Holocaust, Klein's work "Deir Yassin: History of a Lie," has the appearance of scholarship. It is heavily footnoted, and documented and relentlessly plods through every quote and claim made about the events at Deir Yassin.

Klein's methods are similar to the Holocaust deniers. He uses half quotes, specious arguments and ad hominem attacks in an effort to confound an ordinary reader. He admits what cannot be denied, but minimises its importance. In the end he claims that Deir Yassin was only a minor but necessary skirmish. It was fought Klein says, to eliminate a hostile Arab presence that was threatening to the Jews of Jerusalem. And its reality he says was distorted by a combination of Arab propagandists, Jewish establishment enemies of the Stern and Irgun Gangs, Jewish leftists and the exaggerated boastings of those who were there (whom, he says, only made their claims as a part of their psychological propaganda campaign against the Arabs).

Klein's purpose is larger, of course, than the discrediting of Deir Yassin. He and his movement seek to rewrite history by eliminating from its record one of Zionism's more odious events. Klein knows that the terrorism at Deir Yassin did not stand-alone. As modern Israeli historians now acknowledge (and as Arabs have always known), Deir Yassin was but one piece of a concentrated Zionist strategy to terrorise Arabs in order to expel them on the way to depopulating their villages in order to either repopulate them with new Jewish immigrants or to erase them from the map.



A 1948 Acme Photo with the caption: "Menachem Beigin, leader of Irgun Zvai Leumi congratulates one of his men during a parade in Jerusalem, on which occasion he made one of his first public appearances. Behind Beigin is his 'adjutant,' a man who dresses exactly like him, even to glasses, presumably to foil a would-be assassin."



Mordechai Ra'anan (left), who led the attack on Deir Yassin, with Beigin

All this would be frightening enough if Klein were merely a liar and a deliberate distorter of fact. But the reality is even more frightening. He is a fanatic true believer for whom Zionism can do no wrong. And Klein is not alone. He heads an organisation, which he has effectively used to intimidate opponents. By preying on fear, Klein has silenced foes in the media, in politics and even within the Jewish community. He has, over the past decade won minor battles, forcing newspapers to change maps, forcing Jewish organisations to disinvite speakers, forcing politicians to change their votes. Now it appears he has trained his guns on a major campaign to erase a massacre from history and intimidate those who would resist.

That Klein's efforts must be combated goes without saying. If his campaign goes unanswered, he will win and politicians, the media and even historians may come to question either the fact that a massacre did take placed at Deir Yassin or that it was an important component in the effort to terrorise some Palestinians to leave their homes.

In this context, it is important to note that a small but potentially important effort is underway to defend history. "Deir Yassin Remembered" is a new organisation dedicated to preserving the memory of that outrage by publishing materials, both documentary and commentary, and by constructing a monument to the massacre in the place where the village of Deir Yassin once stood.

The founder of "Deir Yassin Remembered" Dan McGowan, a professor at Hobart College in New York, was a guest on my ANA weekly call-in television show "A Capital View". Not only did we have the opportunity to commemorate the massacre and discuss the work of the committee, but the programme also provided a number of survivors the opportunity to call-in and share their reminiscences with our nationwide audience.

One caller had been a young girl at the time of the massacre. She described in harrowing detail what she saw and survived. Her grandmother, uncle and two-and-a-half-year-old brother killed — the rest of her family was forced to flee. Another, a male nurse, recalled seeing survivors, prisoners of war, paraded through Jewish neighbourhoods in Jerusalem. Still another reported how these same prisoners were taken to a quarry outside of the village and shot in cold blood.

Beginning next month Arab American organisations will take the campaign one step further. A huge quilt has been created with one large hand-embroidered patch for each of the 418 Palestinian villages destroyed by Israel since 1948. The "Quilt Project" will travel throughout the month of May across the United States. It will be greeted by rallies and events in major US cities.

This effort to remember and defend our past is a vital component to the struggle to create justice in the future. The ZOA effort to deny and rewrite history is a continuation of the Zionist campaign to deny not only justice to the Palestinians, but their very history and existence as well. Deir Yassin was a massacre. There are too many witnesses, Arab, Jewish, and European to deny that fact. But it was more than that; it was a deliberate act of terrorism with a clear political objective. It was callously used. After the massacre, Haganah sound trucks drove through Arab areas warning "unless you leave your homes, the fate of Deir Yassin will be your fate."

As Menachem Begin himself declared in the The Revolt, "Arabs throughout the country, induced to believe wild tales of 'Irgun butchery' were seized with limitless panic and started to flee for their lives. This mass flight soon developed into a maddened, uncontrolled stampede. Of the almost 800,000 who lived on the present territory of the State of Israel, only some 165,000 are still there. The political and economic significance of this development can hardly be overestimated."

It was an offensive campaign to conquer Arab land and depopulate (now called "ethnic cleansing") Arab villages. Noted David Ben Gurion in his *Rebirth and Destiny of Israel*: "Until the British left (May 15, 1948) no Jewish settlement, however remote, was entered or seized by the Arabs, while the Haganah... captured many Arab positions and liberated Tiberia, and Haifa, Jaffa, and Safad... So on the day of destiny, that part of Palestine where the Haganah could operate was almost clear of Arabs."

Add to this, the admission of Yitzhak Rabin that he ordered the forced expulsion of 40,000 Arabs from the Palestinian village of Lydda. Said Rabin: "The inhabitants of Lydda must be expelled quickly without attention to age... implement immediately." The same has been admitted by Yigal Allon, who headed the Palmach. His goal, he wrote was "the need to clean the upper Galilee of Arabs." His tactic was to use fear and terror to force Arabs to flee. Forced expulsion and terrorism defined the Palestinian exodus of 700,000. Ethnic cleansing and erasing villages defined the formation of the Jewish state in 1948. This we have always known. This some Israelis now admit. And this is what Klein and his Likud cohorts now seek to deny.

Fifty years later in the midst of a dying peace process, the ZOA seeks to deny and intimidate others into denying these historical facts so as to continue to deny justice to the Palestinians in their ancestral homeland. To demand justice, we must defend the past.

The writer is president of the Washington-based Arab American Institute.

History with Arabs

An Israeli television series has provoked widespread controversy after it recognised the fact that Palestinians were deliberately expelled from their land in order to create the Zionist state. **Graham Usher** reports from Jerusalem





Israelis at the Gush Etzion Junction, last Sunday, trying to enter Hebron to protest a government sponsored 50th anniversary Passover celebration *(photos: AFP&AP)*

"The anger at Tkuma is rooted in the fact that the series ruins the denial mechanisms we Israelis have developed to repress the wrongs done to Arabs during the establishment and growth of the state"

Last week, Israelis tuned in to watch the latest episode of *Tkuma* (Hebrew for "Resurrection"), a 22-part televised history of Israel being shown on Israel's Channel 1 TV to commemorate the State's 50th anniversary.

The entire series has been controversial, especially earlier episodes which showed how the establishment of Israel was at least partly realised through the deliberate expulsion of Palestinians from their lands in what had been, prior to 1948, mandate Palestine. But the latest episode succeeded in causing an outrage even before it was aired.

Entitled the "Path of Terror — Biladi, Biladi ("My country, my country"), the programme looked at the emergence of the PLO as a national movement advocating and practising armed struggle as a strategy to liberate Palestine. It began with a 1969 interview with Yasser Arafat vowing that "Palestinians will return to their homes" and ended with some archive PLO footage of Palestinian guerrillas evacuating Beirut in 1982 to the strains of the Palestinian national anthem, "Biladi, Biladi". In between, nine Israelis and six Palestinians gave contrasting interpretations of such events as the killing of nine Israeli athletes by the PLO's Black September movement at the 1972 Munich Olympics, the 1978 Camp David accords signed between Egypt and Israel and Israel's 1982 invasion of Lebanon.

For most Palestinians, the episode was largely a conventional Israeli reading of the years 1967 - 1982, though some admitted that in allowing Palestinians to speak of their own history there was at least an attempt at balance. "*Tkuma* has shown bits and pieces of the real history, but not the complete history," PLO spokesman Bassam Abu Sharif said. Israeli reviewers associated with the Labour and Meretz parties also saw the "Biladi" documentary as an attempt to place the PLO's armed resistance (or "terrorism," as the Israeli interviewees insisted on calling it) in the wider context of Palestinian nationalism, so as to "know the motives of the other side in the war, the side we will have to make peace with in the not too distant future," as the retired army general, Shlomo Gazit, expressed it in Israel's *Yediot Aharonot* newspaper on 6 April. Yet, for other Israelis, any attempt to understand the PLO as a nationalist phenomenon rather than a "terrorist" one proved a transition too far. Nor was their criticism limited to reviews.

Prior to "Biladi's" screening, the episode's writer and director, Ronit Weiss-Berkowitz, received death threats and hate calls accusing her of being an "Arab lover" who "glorified terrorism". On the day of transmission, Israel's High Court of Justice heard a petition from a Jewish organisation dedicated to "protecting the state of Israel's identity". It called on the court to ban the entire *Tkuma* series for "twisting history and making Israel the aggressor and not the victim". The court threw out the petition on the grounds that it was not the "censor" of the Israeli Broadcasting Association (IBA). Communications Minister Limor Livnat also lambasted the programme, warning ominously that she looked forward to the day when the IBA would "carry out its duty to produce a Zionist broadcast which doesn't purport to represent only the Palestinian side".

Why the furore? For Tom Segev — one of Israel's "new" historians who has done pioneering research on Israel's early years — *Tkuma* was bound to be controversial because it deals with history. And "history in Israel is a sensitive subject in ways that politics is not," he says. This is because "Zionism is a particular interpretation of Jewish history. So, in addressing this history, *Tkuma* is addressing the most basic ideological and existential discourses of Israeli society."

Another "new" Israeli historian, Ilan Pappe, agrees. He believes that the fuss whipped up by *Tkuma* is due less to the answers it provides — which are couched in traditional Zionist terms — than to the questions it poses. "The very language *Tkuma* uses to describe Israel's establishment is provocative to many Israelis," he says. "The series refers to the war of 1948 rather than the liberation of 1948. It talks about the expulsion of Palestinians from their lands. It concludes that the expulsion was morally justified, but it no longer disputes that expulsion took place. This is to strike at one of the founding myths of Zionist history."

And this — according to the Israeli writer, Arie Caspi — is what has triggered the various attacks on the *Tkuma* series and its makers. Writing in *Ha'aretz* newspaper last week, Caspi says that "the anger at *Tkuma* is rooted in the fact that the series ruins the denial mechanisms we [Israelis] have developed to repress the wrongs done to Arabs during the establishment and growth of the state." In commemorating Israel's Jubilee, "*Tkuma*'s critics would have preferred a history without [Palestinian] refugees, without a military government, without occupation and, indeed, without Arabs at all."

Tkuma thus reveals — however partially — that in the end such denial can be no defence against history, and that until the Palestinian question is fully acknowledged, there can be no solution for the future.

We welcome letters and contributions on all subjects raised on this page. Material may be edited for length and clarity; it should be addressed to M. Anis, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Galaa St., Cairo; Fax: +202 578 6089; E-mail: weekly@ahram.org.eg

Big projects under review

THE MINISTERIAL Committee for National Mega-Projects decided last week to start the mechanics of handing over pieces of land to investors in the Toshka area in southern Egypt.

The committee also reviewed progress reports on the Gulf of Suez and Sharq El-Tafriaa (east of Port Said) projects and decided to invite bids for building two power stations under the joint public-private Build, Operate and Transfer (BOT) system.

The committee also approved the timetable for the Sharq El-Tafriaa projects. The contract for these projects is expected to be signed during the next few days.

Moreover, the committee also agreed to invite national investors to bid for the project of Suez Gulf port during April.

The Governors Council also met last week to discuss five reports concerning the new mega-projects. The Council signed the contract for the establishment of Sharq El-Tafriaa port and tax free zone in Port Said. The new port, located on 1,200 feddans, is expected to cost LE1.5 billion and provide half a million job opportunities.

The Egyptian Company for Development of Port Said will be managing the industrial zone under a 50-year franchise contract. The company will enjoy a 20-year tax exemption.

Debts repaid

EGYPT has decided to make an early repayment of a small portion of its $30.5 billion foreign debt.

Ismail Hassan, governor of the Central Bank of Egypt, said that by paying back this portion of the debt, the Egyptian government hopes to benefit from the drop in interest rates — especially in light of the CBE's abundant foreign currency reserves which exceed $20 billion.

Of the total $30.5 billion in foreign debt, Egypt will repay Hungary $9 million, originally due in 2007. As a result of its early repayment, Egypt is expected to receive a 35 per cent discount on this debt. Another $41.5 million will be paid to the Czech Republic which will also grant Egypt a 30 per cent discount.

Hassan said that negotiations are currently under way with the African Development Bank to make early repayment of debts owned to the bank. Egypt has also agreed with the World Bank to pay part of its debts on which an interest of 10 to 11 per cent is charged.

Hotels to be privatised

THE HOLDING Company for Housing, Tourism, and Cinema (HHTC) recently invited investors to bid for the San Stefano Hotel in Alexandria. This is the first hotel to be sold since the government announced its intention to privatise state-owned hotels late last year.

According to an advertisement published in the national papers, the hotel buildings and the land on which they stand are all up for sale. Investors or groups of investors can use the the location to set up various attractions, including a five-star hotel which should carry the name San Stefano, the announcement stated. Investors may pick up the contract terms booklet until 18 May and bids will be opened on 19 May.

The sale of another hotel, El-Nil, located in Garden City, is scheduled to follow soon. Mohamed Bakir, sector manager for privatisation at the HHTC, said that an advertisement for the sale of Nile-side El-Nil will be published late this month.

According to Bakir, investor interest has been stronger for the El-Nil Hotel because it offers many advantages.

"Because the hotel is currently closed, the buyer would not have to worry about labour problems or about replacing an existing management contract, in addition to its being situated in a very strategic location," he said. Bakir attributed the lesser interest in San Stefano to the generally low demand on tourism investments in Alexandria.

No schedule has yet been set for the sale of the remaining state-owned hotels. The fate of several historical hotels — Mena House Oberoi, Marriott, Cataract in Aswan, Luxor's Winter Palace, and Palestine in Alexandria — remains controversial. The holding company had previously decided that the five hotels will be joined into one company.

"A portion of the shares of this company will then be put up for public subscription while the rest will remain in the hands of the holding company," said Bakir. The Supreme Committee for Privatisation is now considering what percentage of the company will be offered for public subscription. According to Bakir, the holding company is expected to retain between 51 and 60 per cent.

Next on the privatisation menu

THE PUBLIC sector's tight, lengthy monopoly over shipping and port service seems to be loosening. The holding company for Maritime Transport offered a 25 per cent share of the equity of its subsidiary the United Arab Shipping and Stevedoring Company (UASS) for public subscription this week through the Cairo and Alexandria stock exchanges. The company is the first element of the maritime transport sector to be privatised. It is also the first of six subsidiaries that the holding company for maritime transport plans to privatise this year.

The offering, which will last for a week ending Sunday, 19 April, comprises 948,600 shares that can be increased according to the volume of demand. The shares offered at LE31 each will be available in minimum lots of 50 shares for individuals and 1,000 shares for investment funds. Alexandria Maritime Bank is the manager of the offering.

After the sale, UASS's ownership structure will be changed so that the government stake will be diminished to 41 per cent. While the company's Employee Shareholders Association will hold about 8 per cent of the company's equity, the remaining 51 per cent will be privately owned. As a result, the company will be subject to Joint-Stock Company Law which regulates the performance of private companies in Egypt.

UASS has posted profits of LE17.8 million in fiscal year 1996-1997 and almost equal profits in the previous year. Moreover, the company's forecasts for its price/earning ratio (P/E) and earning-per-share (EPS) are the same for the next two fiscal years, with a P/E. of 7.8 times and and EPS of LE4 for both years. This means that the company rules out any growth in its short-term profits.

The privatisation of the maritime transport companies was given the green light by the People's Assembly only last November. The announcement of the port service sector privatisation plan was cautiously welcomed by experts who believe port services need massive changes in structure and size.

Edited by **Ghada Ragab**

Free trade wars

Establishing free trade zones is now very much the fashion in the Middle East, as different countries vie to achieve robust economic expansion and unleash their enterpreneurial energies. Gamal Essam El-Din investigates

As the MENA Economic Conference held last November in the Qatari capital of Doha was drawing to a close, US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright surprised the media by announcing that Jordan was being singled out by the Clinton administration to have the privilege of establishing a free trade zone with the United States. According to Albright, the US decision was not only a reward to Jordan for actively participating in the Doha Conference, but also carried a significant message to Middle East countries that economics is not separate from politics.

In Egyptian political and economic circles, however, the US decision was interpreted less as a reward to Jordan than as a punishment for Egypt. Sameh Ashour, the sole representative of the Nasserist Party in the People's Assembly, explained: "Egypt has long been prompting the US, mainly through the US-Egypt Presidents' Council, to approve the establishment of a joint Egypt-US free trade zone but to no avail. Now, the message is clear. Economic cooperation with the US is always conditional on a pro-US political position. Thus the US seems set on imposing double standards not only in politics but also in the economy."

The Egyptian government, fearing that the proposed US-Jordan free trade zone will probably function largely at Egypt's expense, especially if Israel were to become a third party to it, have recently decided to strike out on their own by creating a number of rival free trade zones around the Gulf of Suez.

Addressing the People's Assembly last month, Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri explained that the Gulf of Suez is specifically being developed by the government as a strategic investment and free trade zone area. El-Ganzouri indicated that the area of Ataqa-Adabya, to the west of the Gulf, covering some 230 square kilometres, will be developed as an industrial area and free zone, while a new industrial port north of Ain El-Sukhna on the Gulf will also be established.

A technical study for this project, he revealed, is currently being conducted by a specialised US-British company.

El-Ganzouri explained that the investment costs of the first phase of this development are estimated to fall in the range of LE5 to LE12 billion.

It is anticipated that the Chinese government and businessmen will play an active role in this development.

Also to the east of the Suez Canal at Port Said (Sharq El-Tafriea), El-Ganzouri added, an international multi-purpose free trade zone will be established on an estimated area of 60 million square metres as part of a larger plan aimed at developing the ports of Port Said and Damietta. In a first phase, he explained, an international free port will be established on an area of 2000 feddans. A joint stock company with authorised capital of LE1.5 billion, including Egyptian and Australian investors, will be set up to carry out this project.

According to Salah Shaladim, a businessman and MP representing Suez City, the free trade zones in the Suez Gulf are planned as what might be called "the Hong Kong of the Middle East or the Dubai of Egypt." Shaladim explained: "The Suez Gulf boasts a prime strategic position. It serves as a link between Africa and the Arab Gulf countries on the one hand, and between Europe, North America and Japan on the other. Due to this unrivalled strategic advantage, the planned free trade and industrial zone areas around the Suez Gulf are destined to pull the rug from under the feet of any emerging free trade zones in either Jordan or Israel — not to mention their likely role in boosting Egyptian exports, creating employment opportunities for the people around the Suez Gulf and turning Suez itself into a multi-purpose city."

The government, he added, seems determined to make of these industrial and free trade zones a success story. "It is well prepared for this, thanks to a number of liberalisation laws passed by the People's Assembly. These include such measures as opening up the maritime transport and port services sector to private competition and legislating BOT and BOOT projects. Just next week, the People's Assembly is expected to pass a new government draft law, which will give foreign and domestic private sector investors the concession to establish, run and maintain seaports for a maximum of 99 years," Shaladim said.

Mohamed Abul-Enein, an appointed MP and prominent businessman, also highly praises the government's move to establish such free trade zones. According to him, the current fashion for free trade zones is not simply a matter of competition between the region's countries for foreign investment, but is primarily a reaction to the rising culture of globalisation. "It is excellent that the government of Egypt is well aware of this culture, because the world is now evolving into a global village, with a greater number of markets opening up to the free movement of goods, capital, services, people, culture and information," said Abul-Enein.

The growing phenomenon of separate free trade zones, however, seems also to be a nervous reaction to the stalling of the peace process between Israel and its neighbours. According to Youssef Mansour, economic adviser to the Jordanian Minister of Planning, when the peace process was adancing rapidly under the previous Israeli Labour government, Jordan, Egypt and Israel were planning to establish a major regional free trade zone on an area of 180 square km. "This proposed free trade zone was initiated by the three countries at a planning workshop in Amman in 1990 and was called the TEAM area, or Taba-Eilat-Aqaba-Macro Area. However, the TEAM project soon lapsed into limbo when the anti-peace Likud government took office in Israel and each country decided to go its own way when it came to free trade zones," Mansour told the *Weekly*.

For its part, Mansour indicated, Jordan has set about turning Aqaba into a free industrial and trade zone. "In other terms, the government of Jordan has decided to put all the eggs in the Aqaba basket. Why not? It is a spot where the borders of four countries meet. It is an industrial and tourist attraction city, growing at a rate of eight per cent a year," said Mansour. However, he dismissed the claim that Aqaba is being developed by Jordan to counter competition from Egypt's Suez Gulf. "I do not think that there will be any kind of competition in terms of free trade between the two countries. They are friends. The two governments of Egypt and Jordan are continuously consulting with one another, not only about politics, but also about economics. So, it is very probable that the two free trade zones and ports in Suez and Aqaba could complement each other, and even eventually merge into one free trade zone," said Mansour. However, he confirmed that Aqaba would be an ideal location for processing and then exporting Israeli raw materials to the United States when the suggested free trade area between Jordan and the US is fully operational.

In the meantime, it is the Israeli free zones which now seem to pose the greatest threat to Egypt's plans. In 1994, the Israeli Knesset passed legislation aimed at turning several parts of that country into free trade zones, the first of which is the economically depressed Negev Desert, now dubbed the Free Export Processing Zone.

According to El-Badri Farghali, a leftist MP from Port Said, it is no secret that Israel is planning to establish a rival waterway to the Suez Canal, linking the Red, Dead and Mediterranean seas between Ashdod and Eilat ports. However, Farghali is himself against the establishment of free trade zones which are open to all nationalities and goods.

Egypt cannot meet Israel's economic challenge, he argues, through waging a war of free trade zones, but only by reviving the Arab common market plan and turning it into a concrete reality. "This is the most effective way of marginalising, even strangling the Israeli initiative," he said.

More funds are now being offered by international donors to combat industrial pollution. Meanwhile, the tourism industry is being encouraged to go green. Sherine Nasr **reports on environmental-friendly developments**

New fund for environment-friendly industry

As the three-year grace period for Egyptian factories to bring their environmental standards in line comes to an end, international grants are being made available to encourage factories to improve their environmentally friendly performance.

The Egyptian Pollution Abatement Project (EPAP) has been launched to help factories adopt a sound environmental, policy, *and comply with the 1994 Environment Law*, which officially came into effect on 1 March.

"The project aims at establishing new technical and financial mechanisms for factories to enable them to become more environmentally-friendly," said Sherif Arif, the project's general manager. The World Bank is providing most of the project's funding, about $35 million, with the European Investment Bank adding another $15 million and the government of Finland donating $5.7 million.

In the meantime, claims that polluting factories will be granted another grace period to comply with the law were ruled out by State Minister for Environmental Affairs Nadia Makram Ebeid. "We cannot afford further damage to the environment and the law will be strictly applied," she said.

Ebeid has been making surprise tours of different factories to examine the measures taken by each to reduce pollutants. "The industrial sector has, so far, spent LE300 million to adopt proper techniques," she said.

To give them a stronger push in the right direction, factories that are willing to reduce their pollution rates may apply for a grant as well as a soft loan to establish their environmental auditing system. Twenty per cent of the government-guaranteed, 20-year loan can be written off as a grant, and the rest will be repaid at bank interest rates. "Participants will enjoy a two-year grace period and the funds are deposited at the National Bank of Egypt," said Salah Darghouth, Middle East and North Africa director of the World *Bank's Rural Development*, Water and Environment Department.

"This pilot project is an essential move to take. It has become clear that the government cannot handle such a huge task as combating industrial pollution alone," Arif said.

It is obvious, Darghouth said, that banks are becoming more interested in financing environment-related projects. "This was never the case before," he said.

More significantly, industrialists have shown greater interest then ever before in shifting to green industry. "It has become a commercial asset for any company to appear as environmentally-friendly," said Finnish Ambassador to Cairo Aapo Polho. "Industrialists can no longer afford to be described as polluters. This can be very destructive to their competitive *abilities in an open market.*"

Factories applying for the EPAP must meet certain criteria to gain the necessary funds. "The main condition as far as financing is concerned is not to be a loss-making factory," said Ibrahim Abdel-Galil, executive director of the Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency.

Other conditions have to do with the factory's location and type of activity. "We are concentrating on industrial establishments in Cairo, Alexandria, Suez and Ismailia. Heavy and extensively polluting industries are main targets," said Abdel-Galil.

So far, the industrial sector has spent LE200 million to introduce environmental abatement techniques. According to the latest statistics by the EEAA, there are 1,000 factories which *are considered* responsible for the bulk of pollution — 200 of which have already presented their compliance action plan.

Promising as it may sound, the EPAP will only help some 50 factories establish their environmental auditing system. The total investment needed to combat industrial pollution in Egypt has been estimated at $1 billion.

This does not cover the small, yet heavily polluting industries such as lead smelters and brick ovens that exist in unknown numbers and don't comply with any safety regulations. "Unfortunately, the project does not address this category of industries," said Abdel-Galil. "Yet, there is a major plan to move all of them outside the residential zones, but in some governorates such as El-*Sharqiya, they were shut down* for failure to meet the the criteria set by the law."

Darghouth emphasised that more financing will be readily provided if more factories are willing to move. "If there is more demand and the project is working the way we are thinking it will, we will be prepared to have much bigger operations with whatever funds necessary to get the task accomplished," Darghouth said.

Hotels take steps for sustainable tourism

In an attempt to see the hotel business governed by sound environmental criteria, the ministries of environmental affairs and tourism are collaborating on a programme which aims to establish an environmental auditing system for every hotel in the country. Hotels will be able to acquire "green stars", rated according to their success in applying environmentally-sound management techniques. The programme will be put into action in the course of the coming year.

In order to qualify, hotels will have to adopt "The Green Earth Checklist," issued by the Tourism and Travel Organisation together with the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP). The categories covered by the list include energy, water, solid wastes, effluents and emissions. These are the main elements that the ecologically-sound hotel has to deal with through reducing, reusing, recycling or replacing.

"This is an essential move," said Samia Galal, counsellor at the Ministry of State for Environmental Affairs. "This is the only way to cut down on costs, save the environment and use our natural resources in a more sustainable manner," she added.

Applying environmental auditing systems to hotels is a growing international trend. Last year, the World Tourism Organisation (WTO) conducted an international opinion poll in which 95 per cent of the people surveyed expressed concern as to whether or not the hotel they choose is run on environmentally-sound lines.

"Applying the green hotel policy in Egypt goes hand in hand with the attempt to build on our competitive advantages in the field of tourism," said Hussein Badran, first under-secretary at the Ministry of Tourism. "Protection of the environment is now internationally regarded as the leading indicator of a quality service for tourists," he said.

The importance of tourism as an income generator has also put additional pressure on the government to sponsor this programme.

"Tourism is the most important economic activity in terms of generating hard currency in Egypt," said Adel Abdel-Aziz, head of the Egyptian Tourist Authority. In 1997, tourism generated $3.7 billion despite the sudden fall-off after the Luxor attack in November. Tourist development is still moving inexorably ahead.

"The numbers are increasing rapidly," Badran said. "These factors make it essential to decide how such establishments are being run."

For its part, the private sector has responded positively to the programme. "Investors in Sharm El-Sheikh have established their own desalination station with a daily capacity of 7,000 cubic metres, as well as a sewage treatment plant," said Mohamed Nessim, head of the Egyptian Hotel Association and director of an environmental NGO in South Sinai.

Hotels belonging to international chains have also moved fast to adopt a green policy. "Many of these hotels are already using a number of devices to minimise their energy requirements," said Samia Galal. Applying an automatic temperature regulator to switch the air conditioning off once a window is opened, or using a magnetic card to switch off the lights when the client is out of the room, have proved to be very effective measures.

"These technological interventions may seem expensive, but they eventually earn back the outlay. They save money and rationalise the use of resources," said Samia Galal.

Rationalising water use is one leading indicator of a green hotel. Most hotels now have leaflets explaining the scarcity of water and asking if the client is willing to use the towels provided more than once before they are taken away to be washed. Another integral part of environmental management is recycling paper, plastic and glass, which together make up an incredible quantity of waste from each hotel. "Apart from the profit gained by selling these wastes, the process of recycling them creates job opportunities for a large number of not very highly-skilled personnel," Galal said.

One of the pioneering projects in recycling waste was carried out by the Fayrouz Hilton in Sharm El-Sheikh.

"Sharm El-Sheikh has lately developed into one of the biggest resorts on the Red Sea coast," said Nikki Priestley, public relations manager and environmental coordinator at the hotel. "This community produces almost 30,000 tons of recyclable garbage every day," she said.

Hilton started the initiative by buying a number of shredding machines to handle the huge quantities of mineral water bottles clients are using on a daily basis. "These bottles are the highest quality of recyclable plastic available and the hotel has a long-standing contract for its mineral water needs," Priestley said. Other hotels in the area are joining in the effort by sending their empty bottles to be shredded before they are transferred to Cairo for recycling. "By so doing, we were not only able to handle the garbage problem but also made money simply through selling this shredded plastic," said Priestley.

At present, the hotel is planning to start up a number of small manufacturing activities based on recyclable plastic. "We will soon be able to produce our own electric wires, garden hoses and clothes hangers among other products," Priestley said. "There is the potential to make around LE50,000 a month through recycling garbage produced by hotels in the area," indicated a report by a team from the University of Berlin in Germany.

Additional reporting by **Mahmoud Bakr**

Rédacteur en Chef Exécutif
Mohamed Salmawy

Président et Rédacteur en Chef
Ibrahim Nafie

Al-Ahram: A *Diwan* of contemporary life

229 The Egyptian nationalist movement against British occupation and government repression took a new turn in 1912 with the appearance of leaflets all over Cairo and major population centres. The phenomenon followed about three years of government crackdowns on nationalist elements, including detention, exile and surveillance. The leaflets made their debut in Cairo. At a later stage, they were signed by a group calling itself the "Black Hand Society". But the fliers disappeared, and with them the society, as soon as a detained nationalist leader was freed after being cleared of charges that he was behind the leaflet campaign. **Dr Yunan Labib Rizk** tells the story from reports published by *Al-Ahram*

"At dawn on 19 August 1912, inhabitants of Cairo awoke to discover fliers posted on walls along several streets and squares of the city, inciting Egyptians to revolt against the Egyptian and British governments. The fliers also promised the three hot-headed youths recently convicted for plotting to assassinate three of our nation's leaders that they would soon be avenged in a manner that would 'cause the corners of the world to shake'. The police have confiscated 15 of these posters, one of which had been glued onto the door of the Qasr Al-Nil military barracks. The governor of Cairo is currently conducting investigations into the origins of these fliers."

The three "hot-headed youths" referred to in this *Al-Ahram* account were Imam Waked, Mohammed Taher Al-Arabi and Mohammed Abdel-Salam. Only four days previously they had been sentenced to 15 years' imprisonment for conspiring to assassinate the Khedive Abbas II, the British high commissioner and the Egyptian prime minister.

Al-Ahram had taken the occasion of the fliers to caution Egyptian students against engaging in such acts that would "only bring further calamity upon the nation." Not that such fliers were without some justification. Three years of a government clamp-down on the nationalist movement had seen most nationalist leaders routed and sentenced to terms of exile, while police surveillance on the Nationalist Party headquarters in Egypt forced their political activity underground. Acts of conspiracy and revolutionary pamphlets were the natural by-products. And figures such as Ibrahim Al-Wardani, who, in 1910, had been sentenced to death for assassinating Prime Minister Butros Ghali, inspired others to emulate him, so that they, too, might go down in history as martyrs for the nationalist cause.

On 26 August, police apprehended a student named Ahmed Mukhtar who had arrived in Alexandria aboard a Russian steamer coming from Istanbul. *Al-Ahram* reports, "In the process of searching his suitcases, customs officials discovered a picture of His Royal Highness the Khedive and another picture of the prime minister. When they asked Mukhtar why he was carrying these pictures, he became suspiciously flustered. The customs officials summoned the police. When they completed their search of Mukhtar's belongings, they discovered a roll of leaflets inciting Egyptians to violent rebellion in the name of national independence and in emulation of the national martyr, El-Wardani."

To counter the wave of pamphleteering, authorities took three courses of action. Firstly, they monitored the activities of nationalist leaders abroad, suspected of being behind the pamphlets. Most of the exiles had taken Istanbul as their base.

The Union Party government that had supplanted Sultan Abdel Hamid II in Istanbul was not as keen to protect Egyptian subjects. Thus, on 27 August, *Al-Ahram* reports: "We have learned that the Egyptian government has wired a request to the government of Istanbul to conduct a search of Egyptians currently residing in that city and to send the papers and documents they find to Egypt so that they help in the inquiries currently in progress." Authorities in Istanbul were quick to respond. On 4 September, *Al-Ahram* reports: "Police in Istanbul have conducted a search of the office of the *Al-Hilal Al-'Uthmani* newspaper and the home of Sheikh Abdel-Aziz Gawish, after which they took Gawish into custody. Two representatives of the Egyptian police who took part in the search operation were given custody of the confiscated documents and escorted Gawish on board a Romanian liner departing for Alexandria. The sheikh will be taken to the public prosecutor in the Alexandria court where he will be questioned on the charge of composing the revolutionary pamphlets that Ahmed Mukhtar had attempted to smuggle into Alexandria."

Simultaneously, the police rounded up individuals they suspected to be Ahmed Mukhtar's accomplices. *Al-Ahram*'s reports on this operation suggest that it was quite arbitrary. Several people, some of whom were owners of printing presses, were arrested in Cairo and Alexandria. All of them were released after a short period.

The third course of action was to issue repeated warnings to students to refrain from the printing and dissemination of political pamphlets. As Egyptians studying abroad were a primary source of political leaflets, authorities issued a decree prohibiting students from engaging in political activity.

Students in Egypt, meanwhile, were warned that the distribution of revolutionary leaflets was "a criminal offence punishable under Article 47 of the Penal Code, which is the article of law that was applied in the criminal proceedings against the three conspirators who are currently serving their sentences in Tura and El-Manshiya prisons."

In spite of these injunctions, leaflet fever appears to have taken hold of Egyptian youth and to have spread beyond Cairo and Alexandria. On 28 August, *Al-Ahram*'s correspondent in Port Said reports, "Some hot-headed youths have distributed leaflets intended to sow dissension and sectarian strife. The police commissioner has gathered 1,892 copies of these leaflets which had been distributed in the streets and various stores, and forwarded them to the Ministry of Interior. Police have arrested these youths and other individuals who have kept their copies of the leaflets."

On 6 September, *Al-Ahram*'s correspondent in Tanta wrote, "At 3.30am today, police in Tanta discovered revolutionary fliers posted on the walls of the Gharbiya Directorate government building, the home of the directorate chief, the *Waqf* (religious endowments) bureau and other government buildings. The fliers, bearing the heading "Religious War" and signed by "President of the Black Hand Society", are intended to incite rebellion in revenge for the arrest of Sheikh Abdel-Aziz Gawish. They assert that neither Sheikh Gawish nor any other party but the Black Hand Society had a hand in the printing or dissemination of the fliers."

Authorities in Tanta rushed to tear down the posters and instigate a wide sweep of arrests. *Al-Ahram* noted, "Authorities at first thought that the people responsible for the fliers were not originally from Tanta, but now they are inclined to suspect that they are members of the Tanta branch of the Nationalist Party." Based on this assumption, police in Tanta rounded up and interrogated several members of the Nationalist Party in Tanta. In the course of investigations they discovered that preparations were under way for a gathering in a public lecture hall. *Al-Ahram*'s Tanta correspondent reports that the lecture hall was to serve as a forum for "impassioned speeches and to instigate popular dissension in order to secure the release of Sheikh Abdel-Aziz Gawish from prison." The reporter continues, "Having learned of these plans, a member of the police force turned off the lights in the lecture hall and cautioned its owner against permitting the meeting. Afterward, practically everyone associated with the Nationalist Party in Tanta was brought in for questioning."

Al-Mansura was the next city to be struck by flier fever. On 9 September police discovered fliers affixed to the walls of the directorate government building, the home of the directorate chief, the office of the public prosecutor and other public buildings. Also signed by the "Black Hand Society", they read, "Our fellow Egyptians, our country is in dire straits and the nation is in an unbearable state of degradation. Will you rise up to end the cause of this calamitous humiliation? Your brother, Sheikh Abdel-Aziz Gawish has been arrested. See to it that he is not harmed. Indeed, free him from his prison!"

Similar fliers were seized in Al-Mahalla Al-Kubra. *Al-Ahram*'s correspondent was surprised that the fliers had been affixed to many government buildings, including the police bureau. "All of these buildings have sentinels and guards. Where were the police at the time these fliers were pasted up?"

In spite of the notoriety the "Black Hand Society" had gained, subsequent events revealed that it did not have any roots.

Once Gawish was tried and acquitted, the society and its fliers disappeared. Police never were able to apprehend any of its members, and all chance of tracing them faded with the cessation of the fliers.

A large crowd turned out in Alexandria on 7 September to watch the arrival of Gawish's ship. *Al-Ahram*'s correspondent in Alexandria was on hand. The police who had accompanied Gawish from Istanbul descended, carrying Gawish's papers — wrapped and stamped with a red wax seal. After initial questioning, Gawish was taken to El-Khidr Prison pending the arrival of the chief public prosecutor, Abdel-Khaleq Tharwat.

Gawish's arrival provided the chance for the reporter to give the Egyptian public some extra background on the activities of the most prominent nationalist leader after Mohammed Farid. His newspaper, *Al-Hilal Al-'Uthmani* (The Ottoman Crescent), was initially published in Arabic, then in Arabic and Turkish and finally in Turkish only. "He has rented a luxurious villa in the immediate vicinity of the Supreme Porte," continues the reporter. He added that the issue of Gawish's hand-over to the Egyptian authorities had stirred divisions within the Turkish government. In the end, however, the Turkish authorities had to comply with the Egyptian request, "as the current political circumstances compel them to preserve the friendly relations between Turkey and the British and Egyptian governments."

On 15 September, Abdel-Khaleq Tharwat began his interrogation of Gawish. Despite the secrecy of the proceedings, *Al-Ahram*'s Alexandria correspondent learned that Gawish had denied the charges against him. He also denied the statements of Ahmed Mukhtar, whom, he said, had been mistreated in order to force him to confess. Gawish stated his loyalty to the khedive, arguing that he had prevented a demonstration that was being organised by several students in Istanbul in order to "irritate" the khedive during his visit to Istanbul.

Furthermore, investigators could find no incriminating evidence in Gawish's papers. Clearly, *Al-Ahram* writes, "the charges against Sheikh Gawish are founded solely upon the admissions of Ahmed Mukhtar which are insufficient to condemn Gawish in the absence of corroborative testimony or evidence."

For over 40 days the authorities kept Gawish in detention in the hope that corroborative evidence would turn up in Istanbul. They also scoured all ships arriving from Istanbul for any individuals who might be able to provide testimony against Gawish.

On 18 October, Abdel-Khaleq Tharwat ordered the release of Gawish without bond "due to the lack of evidence to corroborate the charge of printing and disseminating the fliers in question." *Al-Ahram* continues, "Sheikh Gawish thanked the public prosecutor for his verdict and, at 5.30 in the afternoon, he left the office of the public prosecutor a free man."

Al-Ahram, too, took the occasion to congratulate Gawish, adding that his release was "concrete proof of the fairness and integrity of the Egyptian justice system." Although Ahmed Mukhtar still had to face trial, *Al-Ahram* along with the other newspapers, lost interest in the case. The last the readers heard of it was on 18 November when *Al-Ahram* briefly announced, "The day before yesterday, Ahmed Mukhtar was sentenced to ten years in prison."

The author is a professor of history and head of Al-Ahram History Studies Centre.

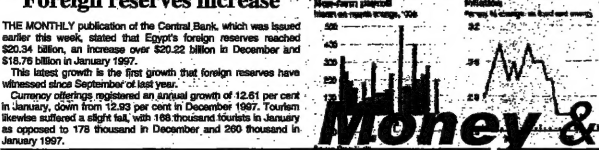


Foreign reserves increase

THE MONTHLY publication of the Central Bank, which was issued earlier this week, stated that Egypt's foreign reserves reached $20.34 billion, an increase over $20.22 billion in December and $18.76 billion in January 1997.

This latest growth is the first growth that foreign reserves have witnessed since September of last year.

Currency offerings registered an annual growth of 12.61 per cent in January, down from 12.93 per cent in December 1997. Tourism likewise suffered a slight fall, with 168 thousand tourists in January as opposed to 178 thousand in December and 260 thousand in January 1997.



Exports to Japan increase

AMBASSADOR to Japan Nabil Fahmy said that Egyptian exports to Japan increased by 120 per cent over the past year, a result of the long-standing cooperation between Egypt and the Japanese Foreign Investment Organisation, which provides support for Egypt to participate in exhibitions held in Japan, and offers facilities for exporters to store Egyptian goods in wharehouses and facilitate their entry on the Japanese market.

The ambassador added that he will be organising a symposium in Cairo in cooperation with the Exporters Federation, in order to exploring the means by which Egyptian companies can enter this market.

NBE: A pioneering role in supporting intra-Arab development

IN LINE with its endeavours to cope with the state's general policy, geared towards promoting and encouraging intra-Arab economic cooperation, the National Bank of Egypt (NBE), has recently taken the following steps:

— Signing a $20 million Unconfirmed Credit Line Agreement with the Arab Trade Finance Programme. Under this agreement, NBE will manage to refinance 85 per cent of the credit deemed necessary for the transactions concluded between Egypt and the Arab countries. The said programme has provided Egypt with 15 credit lines totalling $56.8 million.

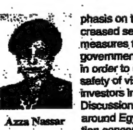
It is worth remarking that the positive role played by the programme in providing finance at concessionary terms, enabled the Egyptian institutions to import and export various commodities from and to the Arab countries. Moreover, the programme's Arab Trade Information Network is currently linked with 11 terminals in 9 Arab countries. This number is expected to increase to 17 terminals in 11 Arab countries soon, helping thus in spreading Arab trade information to a wider sector of Arab importers and exporters.

— Participating in financing a Saudi-capital giant touristic project, with $600 million investment cost, so as to support and stimulate touristic activities as a pillar of economic development.

The project of "Golden Pyramids Plaza", the first of its kind in Egypt in terms of size and nature, is located at the Heliopolis-Nasr City crossing on a total area of 115 square metres. The project will comprise a complex of integrated tourist, investment, dwelling, trading, administrative and recreational activities. It will also comprise a five-star hotel, managed by Holiday Inn Crown Plaza, besides a three-star hotel and boarding houses, managed by Holiday Inn. The project will also include architecturally distinguished villas as well as dwelling and administrative tower blocks, not to mention a multi-store trade and recreational centre à la Ancient Egyptian style.

The above-mentioned efforts come in line with the Bank's policy geared towards attracting Arab investments, achieving Arab economic development and integration, and enhancing the Arab Free Trade Zone so as to keep up with the world trend oriented towards forming major economic groupings.

Consul-general gives lectures


Azza Nassar

WITHIN the framework of strengthening ties between Egypt and India with regards to economic relations, Ms. Azza Nassar, the consul-general of Egypt in Bombay, delivered a series of lectures at Bombay University, the World Council for Tourism, the Rotary Association and the Islamic University, on "Egypt Today". The lectures discussed benefits gained by Egypt in light of speedy development and the economic reform programme, and the investment opportunities within the country. Tourism was also discussed, with emphasis on the increased security measures that the government has taken in order to ensure the safety of visitors and investors in Egypt. Discussions revolved around Egypt's position concerning globalisation and the ability of the Egyptian economy to operate in the new world economic order, through trade liberalisation. She also gave lectures on the status of Egyptian women and their role throughout history in building society, and the rights which the Egyptian Constitution and laws provide them with.

Modern India in a 5-day exhibition in Cairo

INDIA has made major economic strides over the past few years in all fields. This week, *Money and Business* offers a glimpse of some of the features that make India an ideal country for foreign investment.

Capital market

— There are 23 stock exchanges in India trading in scrips of nearly 9,000 companies, the second highest listing in the world.

— India has the third largest investor base in the world with over 20 million shareholders.

— Trading operations at the National Stock Exchange, India's largest, are screen based.

— Foreign companies based in India find it easy to raise equity through public offerings.

— Foreign Institutional Investors can operate both in primary and secondary markets and also the debt market.

— A central depository system has been set up.

Guidelines for foreign investment

— Banking: NRI 40 per cent foreign investment up to 20 per cent.

— Non-banking financial services: Up to 5 per cent foreign equity, no special conditions are attached except those requiring approval of SEBI/RBI, etc.

— For foreign equity beyond 51 per cent but up to 75 per cent, it is necessary that foreign investment should come in one lot.

— Beyond 75 per cent minimum foreign investment should be US$50 million.

Vast market infrastructure

India's vast market infrastructure includes a vast sales and distribution network of over 1 million market intermediaries such as wholesalers, stockists, transporters and retailers. Advertisers can reach more than 700 million people by television and the entire population by radio.

Corporate sector

— There are over 300,000 registered joint stock companies in India with 1,200 being in the government sector.

— The sales revenues of the corporate sector during the period between 1994-1995 and 1995-1996 increased from US$68.57 billion to US$78.57 billion, an increase of 14.58 per cent.

— The gross profit of the corporate sector during the period between 1993-1994 and 1995-1996 increased from US$5.14 billion to US$9.29 billion resulting in a record increase in corporate sector profits at 81 per cent.

Export promotion

Seven geographically dispersed Export Processing Zones (EPZ) with special facilities and incentives for investors have been established. They provide a duty-free environment and basic infrastructural facilities. The same facilities are also available for 100 per cent Export Oriented Units (EOUs).

Incentives for EPZs and EOUs

—100 per cent foreign equity is welcome.

—25 per cent of the production in value terms may be sold in the Domestic Tariff Area (DTA) at concessional duty rates (50 per cent allowed in some cases).

> ***"India is a preferred investment destination. We have drawn up plans in [other countries], but India, which is probably the fastest emerging market, clearly offers the brightest opportunities."* Mr Kim Woo-Choong, chairman, Daewoo Group**

— Single window clearance.

— No import licences are required.

— Industrial plots and standard design factories are available at concessional rates.

Intellectual property rights

The importance of intellectual property in India is established soundly at all levels: statutory, administrative and judicial. Copyrights, trademarks, patents and industrial designs are the four main elements of India's intellectual property rights regime. India's copyright laws are at par with most modern laws in the field and are in tune with the latest developments in satellite broadcasting, computer software and digital technology. Trademarks are afforded full protection and there are no restrictions on the use of foreign brands/trademarks. New legislation giving effect to India's obligations under the WTO agreement is awaiting parliamentary approval.

Investment security guarantees

To ensure the safety and security of foreign investment, India has entered into and is negotiating bilateral promotion and protection agreements with all interested countries. It has joined the Multilateral Investment Guarantee Agency (MIGA).

Premier international agencies have confirmed India's investment grade credit ratings.

Results of reforms

— More than 11,180 foreign collaboration proposals approved since august 1991 aggregating US$38 billion.

— 40 per cent of these proposals are in various stages of implementation.

— More than 6,289 proposals involve foreign investment.

— 4,911 proposals involve technical collaboration.

— Total FDI inflow between 1991-April, 1997 exceeds US$7.20 billion.

— More than 60 per cent of the investment is directed towards the core sectors of the economy.

Continuing reforms

— Peak duty rates lowered to 40 per cent in 1997, down from 350 per cent in 1991.

— Rubee fully convertible on current account.

— Easy repatriation of profits and dividends.

— Import of capital goods at concessional duty rates.

— 5 year tax holiday for several infrastructure projects.

— Single window clearance mechanisms to facilitate and expedite the approval process set up in several states.

— Consumer goods being liberalised.



Al-Ahram Weekly

Rhetorically speaking

There are more rumours that an Arab summit could be held in a few weeks to formulate a joint effort to break the 14-month-old deadlock in the Middle East peace process. Palestinian President Yasser Arafat was the first to suggest a summit a few months ago. Other Arab leaders have expressed approval of the idea.

But what can an Arab summit achieve now beyond the point reached in Egypt in the summer of 1996? Very little, if anything, aside from the traditional vibrant rhetoric.

The 1996 summit resolutions are, in the words of Foreign Minister Amr Moussa, still valid and adequate today. The pursuit of a peaceful settlement is still an irrevocable Arab strategic choice. The establishment of Arab relations with Israel is still conditional on Israel's responsiveness at the negotiating table. Egypt and Jordan are the only Arab countries that have peace treaties with Israel. Apart from diplomatic relations and very limited exchanges in a few other fields, the peace between them is cool and strained.

If the 1996 summit's achievements cannot be improved upon, there is no reason for a new gathering. If the proponents of a new summit think it would be a good means of putting some pressure on the United States to get it to twist Israel's arm, they are mistaken. The Arab friends of the United States, notably Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Jordan, can always act individually to do the job in private without the embarrassment that a public summit could cause.

Egypt seems lukewarm at the idea of a new summit. Foreign Minister Moussa told reporters this week, "We do not rule out an Arab summit at a later stage, or even at an early stage, but the matter requires adequate preparation and consensus."

The consensus bit is problematic. An Iraqi cabinet minister said last week that Iraq would like to attend the next summit. It is very doubtful that Kuwait, and possibly other Gulf countries, would agree to Iraq's participation. As long as inter-Arab problems prevail, how can we hope to settle other differences?

Al-Ahram Weekly

Chairman of the Board.......... **Ibrahim Nafie**
Editor-in-Chief.......... **Hosny Guindy**
Managing Editor.......... **Hani Shukrallah**
Assistant Editor.......... **Wadie Kirolos**
Assistant Editor.......... **Mona Anis**
Layout Editor.......... **Samir Sobhi**
General Manager for Advertising.......... **Hassan Hamdi**

Al-Ahram Offices

Main office
AL-AHRAM, Al-Galaa St. Cairo.
Telephones: 5786100/5786200/5786300/5786400/5786500. Direct: 5786064
Telex: 20185/93346 Fax:5786089 /5786833
E-mail: weekly@ahram.org.eg

Overseas offices

USA
Washington DC: Atef El-Ghamri, Al-Ahram Office, Suite 1258, 529 National Press Bldg, Washington DC 20045; Tel: (202)-737-2121/2122.
New York: Atef El-Ghamri, Al-Ahram Office, 39th Fl., Chrysler Bldg., 405 Lexington Ave, New York, NY 10174-0300; Tel: (212)972 6440; Telex: 497 9426 ITT U.I.; Fax: (212) 286 0285.
Los Angeles: Soraya Aboul Seoud, 600 S. Curson Ave., 402 LA, CA 90036, USA; Tel: (213)-857-0941; Fax: (213)-857-7084.

Russia
Moscow: Abdel-Malek Khalil, Ahram Office, Kutuzovski Pro Dom 7/4 Kv. 50, Moscow; Tel: 243 4014/ 243 1424; Fax: 230 2879

Canada
Montreal: Mustafa Samy Sadek, Al-Ahram Office, 800 Rene-Levesque Blvd, West Suite 2440, Montreal H3B IX9, Quebec; Tel: (514)876 7825 Fax: (514) 876 9262/ (514)876 7825.

United Kingdom
London: Amr Abdel-Samie, Al-Ahram Office, 203 - 209 North Gower Street London NW1 2NJ
Tel: 0171 388 1155, Fax: 0171 388 3130

France
Paris: Sherif El-Shoubashy, Bureau Al-Ahram 26, Rue Marbeuf, 75008 Paris; Tel: (1) 537 72700; Al-Ahram F.; Fax: (1) 428-93963.

Germany
Frankfurt: Mohamed Eissa El-Sharkawi, Al-Ahram Bureau Friedrichstr. 15, 60323 Frankfurt, Tel: (069) 9714380/ (069) 9714381 Fax: (069) 729571.

Austria
Vienna: Mustafa Abdalla, 2331 Vosendorf Orts Str. 253; Tel: 692965/ 694805; Telex: 13 2726 GIGI A; Telefax: 694805.

Greece
Athens: Abdel-Azim Darwish, 69 Solonos St., Third floor, Kolonaki 106-79, Athens, Greece. Tel. and Fax :3634503.

Italy
Rome: Mustafa Abdallah (S.A.B. 2000) 00191 ROMA-V. Guido Bant, 34. Tel: 3332250 Fax: 3332294

Japan
Tokyo: Mohamed El-Dessouki, Duke Aoyama 4-11, Higashi 4 - Chome Shibuya - Ku, Room 402, Tokyo; Tel: (03) 340 63944; Fax: (03) 340 6625

South Africa
Johannesburg: Mohamed Sabreen, Oxford Manor, 196 Oxford road-Northland 2116, Johannesburg, Tel.and Fax: (011)4477425.

Brazil
Rio de Janeiro: Ahmed Shedid, Cx. Postal 2395, CEP. 20001.

Zion and the end of history

What do the golden arches and the Wailing Wall have in common? Abdel-Wahab El-messiri looks beneath the surface to uncover the continuing power of an old Western utopia

Our modern world confronts us as a series of discrete, disconnected details and fragments. Nevertheless, if we look at certain events in contemporary history, we can sometimes uncover an underlying pattern. For instance, one might ask the following questions:

What is the relation between the final solution to the Jewish question adopted by the Nazis and the eternal capital of Israel; between cloning and colonialism; or between Macdonald's and transnational corporations on the one hand, and Zionism on the other?

Does this little heap of fragments and senseless icons have any meaning? On the surface there is nothing but incoherence and chaos. But if we are prepared to dig a little deeper, then an intelligible pattern may begin to emerge.

The common element underlying these phenomena and concepts is their attempt to cancel time and history, to liquidate complexity, and to deny man's capacity to transcend his material reality. The Nazis' final solution implies a negation of the complex historic reality of German society which contained both Aryan Germans and Jews (as well as other groups, such as gypsies or the mentally and physically disabled). The Nazis, however, decided to "simplify" matters and start afresh in a bureaucratically-controlled world that would be subject to the criteria of a "value-free" rationality. All those supposed to be of no use were to be eliminated, so that the Third Reich would become an awesomely sterilised entity — exactly like the Third Temple (one of the numerous names of the Zionist state) which is supposed to last till the end of history, with its eternal capital in Jerusalem.

Cloning is, likewise, a denial of history and memory, thanks to which we can produce in the laboratory simple, sterilised carbon-copies of anyone we like, even of ourselves, with an identical face and an identical surface, but totally lacking in depth and dimensions. Colonialism, too, is yet another attempt to deny history: it transforms the whole world into simple matter (without any value, identity or history) that can be utilised to serve the interests of whichever society proves the most powerful.

Finally, McDonald's produces simple food, which is colourless, tasteless and odourless. It does not belong to a given civilisation nor does it move in a specific space-time. It has no specificity and knows no boundaries, just like the multinational and transnational corporations, which are only concerned with simple, one-dimensional commodities and with even simpler and more homogenous prices, heedless as they are of good and evil. In this, they are not unlike Zionism, when it alleges that the Arabs had no history in Palestine and that the Jews had no history outside it, in the diaspora. In so doing, it tries to establish a new, simplified Zion, in which the Arabs are non-existent (*Arabrein*), which has no boundaries and will never stop expanding — a voracious Zion that has the capacity to swallow up the territories occupied before and after 1948, as well as before and after 1967.

What unites these disparate phenomena is, thus, the idea of the End of History. And what lies behind this curious concept is the distinction between culture and nature. It is the idea of nature that is pivotal in the philosophical discourse of the West.

Let us take an extremely simple definition, namely, that culture and civilisations are everything that is man-made; the rest is classified as "nature (or "nature-matter"). In our modern times, one can argue that there are basically two philosophical outlooks: a man-centered outlook and a nature-centered outlook. The former views man as an autonomous entity, irreducible to nature-matter. The latter reduced man to natural law and the movement of matter, seeing him as a completely natural being.

The expression, "the End of History", has of late been widely used. It means that history, with all its complexities and simplicities, its fixities and flux, its longings and frustrations, its nobility and meanness, would at some point reach its end, becoming completely fixed, devoid of conflicts, dualities and specificities, as everything is reduced to one natural-material general principle that would account for everything (without any distinction between the natural and the human). Man will then entirely dominate his environment and himself, and he will find final scientific solutions to all his problems and sufferings. Scientific knowledge, according to this view, is the knowledge that will enable us to control the law of necessity and will give us the capacity to found a scientific Zion, that is, a technocratic, technological Utopia.

The problematic of the end of history is latent in many philosophic systems, but it has become a basic theme in Western Civilisation since the Renaissance. We may say that the utopias of the Renaissance are themselves a manifestation of this theme. Most of them are technological, technocratic utopias, such as those of Tommaso Campanella (1568-1639), *The City of the Sun*, or of Sir Francis Bacon (1561-1626), *The New Atlantis*. In each case, definitive scientific solutions, derived from nature, put an end to all human problems and establish a paradise on earth.

The rejection of history and time manifests itself in a more complex fashion in the age of the Enlightenment. Enlightenment thought, taking as its point of departure the belief that history is a human activity, the fruit of man's reason and the repository of his knowledge, tends at times to glorify and venerate history. But the contrary is also true, for the law of Reason is nothing but the law of nature-matter, and the enlightened mind does not derive its norms from history, civilisation or society, but from a rigorous scientific study of the laws of nature-matter themselves.

And thus, instead of the traditional, providential view of history, history came to be seen as propelled by material forces immanent in it. From this premise, two different views of the purposive nature of historical movement emerged. Some thinkers came to believe that the movement of history (like nature-matter) has neither goal nor purpose. Others claimed that the movement of history is evolutionary and teleological, yet governed by rigid laws which are in reality the laws of nature. It was this second view which translated into the vision of history as progress, but a progress whose ultimate frame of reference is nature-matter, and whose ultimate goal is the realisation of natural law through historical change. Again, natural history will eventually replace human history.

We can say that the system underlying all comprehensive secular ideologies (Nazism, Marxism, Liberalism, Zionism) is what might be termed "unilinear evolution", that is, the belief that there is a single scientific and natural evolutionary law to which all societies and human phenomena conform. Progress in reality is nothing but a cumulative process of materialistic rationalisation, namely a reformation of human reality after the model of nature-matter, so that all the qualitative, complex, ambiguous and mysterious elements are eliminated. Reality is thereby turned into mere matter that can be utilised, and man's goal is then to use both his fellow men and nature as efficiently as possible. This dream of rationalisation gradually escalates until everything is programmed and man himself is controlled, both from within and without.

This escalation of rationalisation and its application on a worldwide scale is what we today refer to, rather tamely, as globalisation.

The writer is professor emeritus at Ain Shams University.

Water versus land [5]

In his final article on the problems of water shortage, Mohamed Sid-Ahmed discusses the dialectics of a situation in which water, rather than land, becomes the determining political factor

Our planet is described as the Blue Planet because most of its surface is covered by oceans and seas. However, human beings live on land, not in the sea — at least so far. And for water to sustain human life, it has to be devoid of salt. So only a small fraction of the water that covers our planet, namely that of rain or of rivers and lakes, contributes to the survival of the human species.

When sweet water was abundant, it was land that mattered the most. Societies depended on specific space coordinates: the state emerged within specific sovereign borders covering a well defined area of land. The growing scarcity of potable water has brought about a shift in priorities, with the geography of water gradually acquiring precedence over the geography of land. River basins are emerging as a basic political entity, perhaps more important than national states. This erodes the traditional notion of sovereignty, which is linked more to territorial integrity than to the course of a given river, especially if the river in question passes through a number of states. As the relevance of political entities defined by specific geographical borders diminishes, that of entities determined by the trajectories of major rivers increases. The threat of water wars is the most glaring illustration of this transformation.

These are issues of particular importance for Egypt. With the growing demand for the water of the Nile, the riparian countries must settle their differences and, eventually, build up their solidarity by working out mutually beneficial solutions to problems which constitute latent sources of friction. To that end, they should avoid looking to external parties as a means of acquiring unilateral advantage in what is a potentially explosive situation. One of the main achievements of the Paris Conference on Water and Sustainable Development was to draw attention to the need for legislation to govern the conflicts that could emerge between riparian countries sharing the same source of potable water.

By the same token, non-riparian countries should not be considered direct parties when it comes to problems between neighbouring riparian countries. Thus Israel should not concern itself with the Nile. As to the Euphrates, it concerns Turkey, Syria and Iraq, while the River Jordan concerns Jordan, Lebanon, Syria, Palestine and Israel. On the other hand, countries locked in conflict situations over traditional reasons for conflict could become interdependent in the context of water politics. This is a new factor in regional and global politics that cannot be discounted.

Still, everything is not necessarily negative in the growing water shortage, which will eventually compel human communities to work more closely together or face a common threat to their very ability to ensure survival. More and more, the contradictions between humans and their environment are taking precedence over the contradictions between different communities within the human species itself. One and a half billion inhabitants of the planet now suffer from lack of sweet water. The figure is expected to grow by half a billion before 2050. No one can predict what could happen beyond that threshold.

Last December, an ecological conference brought together representatives of 150 countries in Kyoto, Japan, to discuss a number of critical ecological problems such as the greenhouse effect. Carbon dioxide was identified as the main culprit when it comes to global warning. But a number of scientists believe that when the amount of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere exceeds a certain limit, plants tend to close the tiny orifices by which they absorb CO_2, but through which they also disgorge their water. This tendency of plants to 'sweat' less in the context of global warming is Nature's way of saving its reserves of this precious commodity.

Contemporary technology has done much to improve the lot of humankind. But its contributions are not limited to its pre-planned positive achievements only. Unpredictable negative side-effects can also occur. The positive effects improve the human condition in relative terms; the negative unpredictable side-effects could prove to be decisive in determining the final outcome, and not only in relative terms. Indeed, modern technology could expose the human species to total self-annihilation. During the Cold War, this scenario could have been triggered by a thermonuclear conflagration. Fortunately, it was not. But even in the post-Cold War world there will always be a statistical possibility that the human race will self-destruct, probably by accident, possibly by design. However infinitesimal the chances of this happening are, the fact that its statistical possibility is not zero means that it will occur sometime. The only question is whether it will occur in a close future, or in such a remote future as to be totally irrelevant to the present.

These considerations are no longer in the domain of abstract speculation, but portray the growing ecological crises as reactions of Mother Nature to the growing potency of human technology. Her reactions are a warning that humans can no longer afford to settle their conflict by violent means if they want to avoid an outcome where all the parties involved are bound to be losers.

Meeting El-Mazni

By Naguib Mahfouz

El-Mazni would have been the most accomplished novelist of the literary pioneers of his generation — Taha Hussein, El-Aqqad, Heikal and Salama Moussa — had he chosen to dedicate his life to literary activities alone. But El-Mazni left us only *Ibrahim Al-Katib* and *Ibrahim Al-Thani*. He was also a skilled translator. His fluent, eloquent style made the reader feel that the book was not translated — that it had originally been written in Arabic.

When my novel *Midaq Alley* was first published in 1947, El-Mazni told a friend of his that he wished to meet me. I went to see him. He lived in a modest house like the one in which my family lived in Farouk Street, Al-Geish Street today. He received me in a room completely lined with books. He encouraged me to continue writing novels, and told me that my writing could be classified as realism, a word I had rarely heard before.

He warned me that this way of writing could prove problematic, and that people could take offence at my work if they interpreted it as referring to them. He told me that in Egypt, novels are considered almost autobiographical, and that I would be identified with the main character in the novel since readers are not used to differentiating between the novel and the author. He urged me to beware.

He cited the names of foreign writers who had been taken to court for their works. I was amazed that a writer of his stature could show such interest in a beginner like myself — that he would want to meet, encourage and warn me against possible obstacles.

Based on an interview by Mohamed Salmawy.

To The Editor

Legal revolution

Sir- I am an Egyptian doctoral student at Harvard Law School and an assistant lecturer at Cairo University's Faculty of Law. *Al-Ahram Weekly* is basically the only Middle Eastern newspaper for which I have sustained a romance this side of the Atlantic! I've incessantly argued with the administration of the Harvard Law School Library to carry the newspaper, won my battle a month ago, and your esteemed journal is now to be found in its rightful place: next to the likes of *Le Monde* and *The Independent*, in the wooden rack of leading international newspapers.

More to the point, I very much enjoyed Hani Shukrallah's article, "What we paid for" (*Al-Ahram Weekly*, 26 March-1 April). I completely agree with his diagnosis, be it on the sacred nature of the right to self expression, or the pro-establishment bias of the press-law. Our country needs more voices like his to help protect our marginal freedoms.

I would like to add to his diagnosis, however, another malaise which has been uniformly absent from this debate: namely, the lack of critical realism in Arab legal discourse. Hani Shukrallah opened his article by professing "little knowledge of the intricacies of the law", and pondered an almost mathematical equation allowing a line to be drawn between free expression of opinion and libel. Sir, no such equation nor line exist. Both are artificial constructs, sustained by the intimidating image of "legal intricacies". It is the kind of legal education our judges, magistrates and lawyers receive which allows such juridical false consciousness to flourish — amazingly, quite often in good faith. The profession is deeply indoctrinated in an image of law where there are right and wrong answers, where in human disputes a legal "science" prescribes, where legal opinions are logically deductible, indeed inescapable. In short, an image of law where the line separating free expression from libel is found, not *made*.

Our legal establishment is heavily invested in this false image for clear professional stakes. What I find sad is that the same false image spills over to our intellectuals, who in judicial deference shy away from all critical activity.

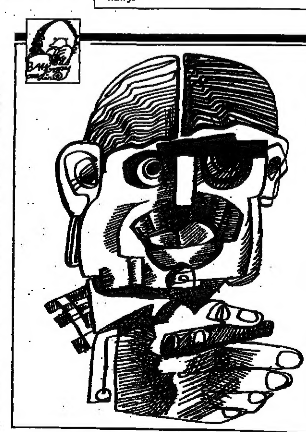
Sir, the introduction of more liberal laws will not be enough to protect civil rights. Our country needs reform in legal discourse, first and foremost in legal education. Before such reform is carried out, journalists will enjoy no long-term security — indeed, no one will. So far educational reform has taken the shape of either a foreign language section in our public universities, or a private sector variation thereon. Both are futile sedatives. Both cater to the already privileged in our deeply unjust society. Above all, both fail to liberate legal discourse from its critical impasse, thus stripping all legal reform proposals from any meaningful long-term impact.

All that I've argued above can be easily dismissed as intellectual self-indulgence, the cockery of Harvard bla bla. It isn't. American freedom of expression, protected under the law, is sufficient proof. Before US judges became the bastions of civil rights that they are today, legal discourse in their country witnessed an epistemological revolution at the beginning of this century. A movement of academics, lawyers and intellectuals, generally referred to as the "Legal Realists," seriously challenged and debunked such notions of "legal line drawing" as the ones we continue to tolerate in Egypt. Their impact was so overwhelming that legal debates today are mostly set in terms of "policy" analyses. Policy is not doctrine: it involves competing visions of a better society, it does not involve competing interpretations of legal hermeneutics. And so, in America today, if judges infringe upon settled civil rights, they are attacked not on doctrinal grounds of line drawing, but on down-to-earth policy debates. The intimidating edifice of "legal intricacies" was thus dismantled. This serves to empower the press, the public, and democratic processes in general. Of course I am oversimplifying the current situation, but such is the gist of it.

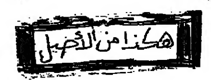
For our country "to achieve any kind of progress", as you put it, we must shift the offensive to legal education. I agree that reform in the judiciary and legislature is essential. But such reform will have no long-term impact. Courts and parliaments are not abstract institutions; they are staffed by men and women. It is to people that we must direct our efforts, if we aim for anything more than transitory exploits. Clearly, what I'm saying is not new. It was advocated more than 100 years ago, at the first steps of modern Egyptian enlightenment. So pray tell, why is it that all our government can think of now is economic reform?

Amr Shalakany
Cambridge MA
US

All readers' contributions and comments should be addressed to The Editor. E-mail: weekly@ahram.org.eg; Fax: +202 578 6089



I projected the struggle between Iran's conservative *ulama* and the supporters of President Khatami onto the face of Gholam-Hussein Karbaschi. The result was something like a Persian miniature revisited by Picasso's muse: a face split down the middle, with elements of transgression able to bridge the divide. Karbaschi, accused of embezzlement and diverting public funds, is bearing the brunt of the anti-Khatami backlash. His are the features of the moderate, enlightened Iran, imprisoned within the rigid bone structure of the conservative establishment.



Close up

Salama A. Salama

Disturbers of the peace

As the Irish peace agreement was signed, US President Clinton expressed his hope that the will for peace would also prevail in the Middle East. In the same breath, he blamed the parties to the Arab-Israeli conflict and urged them to take whatever difficult decisions are necessary.

The Irish problem is no less complex or brutal than the Arab-Israeli conflict, in historical, religious or national terms. The hostility and hatred that charged Catholic-Protestant relations for centuries is no less pervasive than the animosity which rages between Israelis and Arabs. There is, therefore, good cause to wonder why US mediation has been effective in the Irish case, yet such a pitiful failure in the Middle East.

From the start, the US adopted an even-handed and unbiased stance on the bloody conflict in Ireland. This impartial attitude was quite different from its Middle East policy. The US did not provide Ireland with the political, military or strategic support it continues to lavish on Israel. No Irish soldiers with dual allegiance were dispatched to Ireland, but US-Israeli soldiers are still pouring into Israel. Ireland was not used as a means of granting leverage to one political party in the US, while US parties compete for the Jewish vote by loudly backing the Jewish lobby.

Although some 40 million Irish Americans are the descendants of Catholic immigrants who fled persecution at the hands of the Protestants, the sympathies of Irish Americans have not shaped US policy on the Irish question. Some US statesmen, however, did not conceal their sympathy for Irish Catholics and the Republican movement which struggled for independence from Britain.

Clinton, who affirms his Irish ancestry, has never used the Irish crisis to introduce changes to US policy. In fact, he is the only US president to draw on his personal influence to persuade his friends in Britain to work out a compromise settlement which would accommodate the demands of the Irish republicans. The US has consistently avoided angering British governments by any manifestation of support for the IRA and Sinn Fein, considered a terrorist movement by London, and as such excluded from negotiations, until 1994. Any US intervention has been very cautious.

Of course, the Irish agreement will encounter many hurdles, whether in the referendum or in the eventual implementation phase. President Clinton considers it one of his personal achievements, capable of making up for the pitiful fiasco of US policy in the Middle East. In fact, the success is due less to Clinton's skill and influence than to the absence of a strong domestic pressure group similar to the Jewish lobby. In addition, neither party in the Irish agreement achieved their full demands at the expense of the other party, as was the case in the Oslo Accord. Nor is there any indication that either of the two parties will be able to rely on US backing in order to alter or obstruct the implementation of agreement, as Israel does at present.

The threat posed by Israel's supporters in Congress and outside it to President Clinton and the US administration as a whole prevents the US from acting as a genuine guarantor of the peace process. The Jewish lobby has succeeded in postponing the US initiative to get the peace process moving again. Netanyahu's supporters in Congress have braced themselves to maintain the status quo and are encouraging him to further violate Israel's commitments.

There are no grounds to compare the conditions which characterise US policies in the Middle East with the favourable conditions which prevailed at the Irish peace talks. The quest for peace in Ireland did not involve the enemies of peace: the Middle East is a different matter altogether.



Soapbox

Nile surprises

When it comes to environmental protection and preservation, I am never impressed and seldom satisfied. It seems that since 1972, very little has been done. Problems are multiplying in size and scope, both nationally and internationally.

Maybe there is nothing new about that. What is new is that, examining the implementation of the Environment Law, specifically with respect to the protection of the Nile, I was pleasantly surprised. I was almost sure that this law would be just another piece of legislation. I was apprehensive that socio-political considerations would prevent a confrontation with the industries polluting everything around us. But of the 34 major establishments responsible for 60 per cent of Nile pollution, 16 have implemented the necessary measures, six have started and will have implemented them by the end of April, seven will deliver at the end of September, and only five have thus far done nothing.

Today, the environment has a dedicated, efficient minister. Serious efforts are being made to investigate factories by a specially trained team. But the minister needs a police squad trained in environmental laws, like the Tourist Police or Transport Police. I hope she will not hesitate to fine or close down factories which have refused to comply with the Environment Law if she sees this as necessary for the protection of Egypt's human and natural resources.

Possible social and labour consequences cannot be ignored, but we must also take the public's health into consideration. Finding a solution for problems like unemployment is the responsibility of the state, not the Environment Ministry alone.



Laila Takla

This week's Soapbox speaker is president of the National Association for the Protection of the Environment.

A burden greater than debt

It may be time for Egypt to phase out US assistance, writes **Amin Hewedy**: the price we are paying could be higher than it seems

The US government is seeking to withdraw or reduce the aid it grants to some countries within the framework of the Security Aid Programmes, a move which has given rise to intense and widespread debate. This assistance, discussed annually in Congress, is oriented toward the military sector, but is channeled into other fields as well. Economic aid, for instance, is distributed in the following manner: the foreign military sales financing programme; the economic support fund; the military assistance programme; and peacekeeping operations.

The assistance the US offers Egypt and Israel is debated every year in Congress, which has become what many observers describe as "an American arena exploited by Israel". Israel receives $3 billion annually in aid, of which $1.8 billion are principally for economic purposes. Egypt, however, with a population of more than 60 million inhabitants, i.e., at least 10 times the Israeli population, receives a total of $2 billion in aid. Of this amount, $1.2 billion are allocated for military purposes. The remaining $800 million are used for economic development, of which 40-60 per cent is spent on services provided by US companies in research, information and the like.

According to reliable estimates, the real volume of aid granted to Israel is much more than that declared. The *Wall Street Journal* reported that this assistance exceeded $77 billion between 1967 and 1990. This is to say that Israel receives $6 billion annually, not including the private moneys channeled to Israel by US citizens, which total approximately $2 billion in tax-exempted donations.

Israel is able to determine delivery dates of equipment, for instance, from the outset of any contract, as well as the schedule for payments. By virtue of the liquidity it enjoys, Israel is able to pay only the first instalment, using the rest of the sum allocated for the execution of the project to enter into new contracts.

This irregular practice makes it easy for Israel to receive the whole amount of aid in cash. Each October, with the start of the US new fiscal year, Israel receives the total amount of aid money, then purchases US treasury bills, which offer annual profits in excess of $100 million.

On the other hand, loans to Egypt are provided in the shape of equipment, goods and services, which means that the greatest part of these loans reverts to the American exporters. Goods are even transported to Egypt by US companies — which, of course, do not perform this service for free. Nor can Egypt allocate this assistance as it sees fit. Disbursement is effected under the supervision of the US Agency for International Development (USAID). Furthermore, Egypt lacks the capacity to make full use of the assistance allocated. Consequently, any portion of the loan capital which is not utilised during the current fiscal year is brought forward to the next. This practice is referred to as "maintaining aid in the pipeline".

The US systematically waives the payment of loan instalments by Israel. It can be safely assumed that, in most cases, aid to Israel is furnished as a non-refundable grant. Certain sources set total US aid to Israel between 1948 and 1996 at around $80 billion. This amount is equivalent to $450 billion in 1996 prices. The major part of this aid was non-refundable, which is evidence of both the US's unconditional backing of Israel, and the extent of Israel's dependence on the US for it very existence. This situation has prompted the US comptroller-general to ask: What are the costs borne by the US Treasury as a result of this policy? How much longer will Israel continue to ask for more US aid and more concessions before it can service its debts? These issues, he noted, will not be resolved until Israel has settled its problems with its neighbours. This, he estimated, is the "optimal solution for its security concerns". The US, therefore, considers that the threat to Israel's survival, which has prompted Netanyahu to prioritise security over peace, cannot be resolved through military build-up, nor through economic policy. These problems can only be resolved through confidence-building and good neighbourly relations.

In the meantime, however, Israel is being provided with yet another type of support. When it purchases military equipment from the US, American firms are committed to buy Israeli goods or services in return. This sort of bartering may be permitted under US law for ordinary transactions. But it is strictly prohibited in connection with the sale of military equipment. Obviously, Israel is exempted from the application of such prohibitions. On another level, the US imposes strict limitations on technology transfer — but does not apply them to Israel.

Surprisingly, Israel claims that the US owes it credit in that respect. It was Israel that supplied the US with Soviet arms and weapons technology it had seized during its wars against the Arab countries. It provided the US with airplanes, tanks, guns and radar equipment. The reason for the US's restrictions on the transfer of technology, of course, is the elimination of potential competitors. The US's complacency when it comes to Israel is hardly inconsequential, considering that Israel has begun to manufacture advanced equipment domestically with US assistance. The Israeli Mirkava tank is fitted with a US-made 900-horsepower Teledyne Continental engine. The fuselage of the French Mirage-5 airplane, the design of which was stolen by Israeli intelligence from a Swiss engineer employed by Dassault in Switzerland, is equipped with the J-79 engine used on the American Phantom-4 fighter airplane. Similarly, the engine fitted in Israeli Lavi fighters is the US-designed Pratt and Whitney P. 1120. The Grumman Co., an American company, provides Israel with specific information regarding the construction of the fighter's tail, while Bendix and Goodrich manufacture the wheels and brake units.

These examples do not sum up the whole situation. Some statistics claim that 36 per cent of Israeli exports are originally American. If strict regulations had been imposed on Israel for exporting US technology to a third country, Israeli exports would have suffered very severely.

The US provides further indirect support in markets in which it cannot be directly involved. The US resorts to Israel to provide assistance by proxy. Such markets include the dictatorships of South America, South Africa under apartheid, or regimes with which the US cannot trade directly for fear of damaging relations with more important countries, as in the cases of Taiwan, China and Iran.

In its 1983 report, under an item including "aid in specific cases", the US General Accounting Office (GAO) stated that Israel, after signing the peace agreement with Egypt in 1979 under US patronage, had obtained the following: the construction of two airports at Naqab by the US Engineering Corps, from which two squadron fighters can operate during military operations; infrastructure such as naval bases and military bases; information facilities and early warning systems to compensate its losses during withdrawal from Sinai; military equipment to modernise its armed forces; military institutes, training centres and barracks; administrative buildings; all the equipment and machinery used by the US engineers; the construction of two store-houses at each of the air force units at Naqab, fully equipped with spare parts.

The foregoing represents only a fraction of the various items listed in the GAO report. In his address to the US Congress after he became prime minister, however, Netanyahu received a standing ovation when he expressed his government's desire to dispense with US aid in the future. The Israelis seek to transfer 50 per cent of economic assistance to the military sector, then reduce it by five per cent annually, starting with the 2000 budget, to be approved in 1999. This means US economic aid to Israel will be slashed in the coming decade. This also implies that military assistance will almost double, to $2.45 billion. Other benefits, which cannot be assessed fully, not even by the US government itself, will remain intact. This is clearly another of the gimmicks that the Israeli prime minister promotes as a "peace initiative".

It is also obvious that Netanyahu's message to the US Congress was aimed at Cairo. US aid to Egypt is most certainly on the agenda at meetings where strategic relations between the two countries are discussed.

US aid to Egypt cannot be canceled *in toto* at present. But a proposal to phase out aid gradually may be agreed upon. Some Egyptians might feel enraged and demand that US assistance cease immediately. Others, more pragmatic, may argue against this option — providing that we refuse to submit to aid-linked pressure. I subscribe to the latter view, not only because I believe that the US aid programme is financed with Arab capital — a small portion of which was procured by the US through legitimate means, while most was obtained through manipulation — but because I am convinced that this political game is not for hotheads. There is no place for tension at a gathering of calculating minds.

The writer is former minister of defence and chief of General Intelligence.

Wrestling for détente

Eqbal Ahmad on good-will gestures, corporate pressures, and how to pin an adversary

Wrestlers have played a unique role in US-Iranian relations. In 1953, when the CIA was organising the overthrow of the constitutional government of Dr Mohamed Mossadeq, it turned to wrestlers and such toughs of Teheran society as the "chaqu-kash" — literally, knife-wielders. They led the crowds that welcomed General Zahedi's putsch and provided the American media the excuse to describe the CIA-engineered coup d'état as a popular event. Recently, however, there was an ironic reversal of the wrestlers' role: in the US as in Iran, they served as an instrument in starting an Iranian-American glasnost.

Wrestlers had never been entertained in the White House — until last March, that is, when Bill Clinton invited five of them into the Oval Office. The five Arizona wrestlers had participated last February in Tehran's Takhti Cup tournament, the first American athletes to compete in Iran since the establishment of the Islamic Republic in 1979. Mike McCurry, the White House spokesman, explained Clinton's objective thus: "It would be accurate to say that he is drawing attention to an exchange... that has something to say about the prospect and hope for more beneficial relations between peoples." Friendly words were also uttered by an unlikely man in an unlikely place. On 10 March, Martin Indyk, an assistant secretary of state, testified before the Congress on the virtues not only of Iran's President Mohamed Khatami but also of Tehran's attempts to check the smuggling of Iraqi oil, a "concrete act on the part of Iran which is designed to enforce the Security Council resolutions against Iraq." Indyk also cited, as evidence of Iran's changing attitude, Khatami's disapproval of terrorism against civilians in Israel and Algeria, Tehran's "reaching out" to its Gulf neighbours, and a change in its "approach to Yasser Arafat".

Two facts are noteworthy about his testimony. One, Martin Indyk, who is routinely identified in the American media as a "Middle East expert", is not that at all: he is in fact a Zionist immigrant from Australia, parachuted first into the White House, then the State Department by Washington's powerful pro-Israeli lobby. Two, what he cites as evidence of change in Iranian attitude is not new. The discernible change is in Washington's proclivity to pick up positive signals from Teheran. Since early March, it has exhibited unusually sensitive antennas. The US media has reflected the official mood with relatively favourable reporting on Iran, including the good treatment there of Jews and reports of thriving synagogues in Teheran.

Since 1991, Iran has been going through a quiet thermidor, which included enhancement in civil liberties and cultural freedoms, expansion and deepening of secular and scientific education, and gradual liberalisation of the economy. Neither American officials nor the media evinced much interest in it. Khatami's landslide victory last May was undoubtedly a landmark for its rebuff of Iran's conservative radicals, and for the assertion it represented of the electoral will of women and young voters. Yet President Khatami represented continuity, not change from the policy trends established by his predecessor, Hashemi Rafsanjani. Khatami is more contemporary than Rafsanjani in that he belongs to a younger generation of clerical intellectuals who were exposed to the philosophical and political debates of the 1960s and 1970s. His sensitivities, knowledge of the world, comprehension of the West, and awareness of Iran's contemporary needs are different from those of his predecessors.

Mohamed Khatami opened a new phase in Iranian diplomacy when he agreed last January to be interviewed on CNN by Christiane Amanpour, directly addressed the American public on the need for more contacts and better understanding between them and the Iranian people and, at the risk of sparking controversy at home, expressed "regret" at the hostage crisis of 1979. It was a gesture that worked with the audience he addressed. But Washington remained cool. Clinton retorted that the need was for an official dialogue, and repeated stock American positions that such dialogue must address Iran's support of terrorism, its violent opposition to the Arab-Israeli peace process, and its quest for weapons of mass destruction. Madeleine Albright, the US secretary of state, was even more strident when she told *USA Today* that she did not envisage herself visiting Iran "in the near future, or medium or distant future." It was not until his *Eid Al-Fitr* message, broadcast on the Voice of America, that Clinton even hinted that differences between the two countries were "not insurmountable". The first signs of an American thaw occurred in March when the wrestlers were invited to the White House and Martin Indyk was sent to soften the pro-Israel Congressmen.

Since then there has been a rapid exchange of good will gestures between the US and Iran. Tehran has been host to American scholars including Geoffrey Kemp, who served on the advisory staff of Ronald Reagan. In turn, Washington's Georgetown hosted Iranian scholars. Unconfirmed reports have appeared in the American press of limited US-Iranian naval cooperation to prevent Iraq's export of oil in violation of the UN-imposed embargo; the State Department has advised Congress against financing a Radio Free Iran.

In a good-will gesture, Clinton issued a congratulatory message for *Nauruz* and ordered the gradual release of $12 billion of Iranian assets, which the US government had kept frozen since 1979 in punishment for the 52 hostages Iranian radicals had held for 444 days. However, Iran may not be able to recover much of these assets since they will be distributed as "tax credit" to an estimated three million Iranians residing in the United States. Typically, the *New York Times* editorially described it as an "ultimate good-will gesture".

Such hyperbole notwithstanding, there is little doubt that Washington has embarked on a policy of reversing its soured relations with Iran. Its objectives are economic and strategic.

To begin with, American corporations have been chafing over their government's prohibition against doing business with Iran. Their frustrations augmented when European firms began openly to defy the American embargo to find lucrative contracts in Iran. Thus despite hectic American pressures on France's government, its energy conglomerate Total SA signed a $2 billion contract for oil and gas development in Iran. At a petroleum-related conference in Dubai last month, Rosemary Hollis, head of the Middle East programme of the Royal Institute of International Affairs, told delegates that "the clamour from US companies resentful at losing opportunities to foreign competitors is rising." As if to whet the appetite of the losers in the 'battle of contracts', S M Mohaddes, the director of exploration at the National Iranian Oil Company, announced plans to engage foreign firms in on-shore and off-shore explorations of an estimated 20-30 billion barrels of oil. Heads of American energy conglomerates present at the conference — among them Mark Agee of the Syntroleum Corporation and Archie Dunham of Conoco — spoke out in favour of lifting the sanctions against Iran. In a country where the state is linked by myriad ties to capital, corporate pressures are a powerful determinant of policy.

The timing of the wrestling diplomacy suggests a convergence of economic and strategic American interest in improving relations with Iran. The climax of American power in the Middle East was reached with the Gulf War in 1991. Ironically, since the signing of the Oslo Accord, and largely as a result of Israel's systematic violation of it in letter and spirit, Washington's influence among the Arabs has been declining. Iraq's President Saddam Hussein sensed the self-inflicted dilemmas of American power in the Middle East and exploited it, this time with a modicum of intelligence and diplomatic flexibility. The latest debacle of American power in the Middle East exposed the policy of "dual containment" to be a failure. American weaknesses and Arab frustrations were amply enough manifested for the United States to seek another balancing mechanism in the Middle East to supplement Egypt and Saudi Arabia. This option was forcefully advocated earlier by influential members of the foreign policy establishment such as Zbigniew Brzezinski and Brent Scowcraft, National Security Advisers respectively in the Carter and Reagan administrations.

Hence, after the latest crisis in the Gulf, during which the United States found itself virtually isolated from its Arab and European allies, the démarche towards Iran was in order. Keen to break out of its years of isolation, Iran was ready to respond.

The path to normal relations between Iran and the US remains, nevertheless, strewn with obstacles. In the US, the powerful Zionist lobby does not quite favour it, as the Israeli establishment is divided over the issue. Its influence is considerable — in Congress, the State Department, the media, and the White House itself. In Tehran too, radical conservatives continue to oppose the liberalising policies of Mohamed Khatami, who does not firmly hold the reins of the Iranian state. It is possible that they wield enough power to obstruct the resumption of friendly US-Iranian relations.

Who lost the orchestra?



photo: Sherif Sonbol

Mona Rafla

Song recital; Mona Rafla, soprano, David Hales, piano, and the Walid El-Hamamsy trio; Small Hall, Cairo Opera House; 11 April

If you've got to have the Berlin Philharmonic, then you've got to have it. If you are doing Richard Strauss's *Four Last Songs*, you need it, whoever the soprano may be who sings them. But you cannot do these four songs in concert with the piano. Nature is against it.

Last night Mona Rafla attempted just this. She sang Strauss's *Songs*, almost his last compositions, the final Titianesque flourishes of his divinity as an artist, with David Hales at the piano to accompany her. Hales is good, but this is not piano music anymore than the first act of *Tristan* is. To sing such things with the piano turns the hall into a rehearsal room. And that is what we had of the *Four Last Songs* — without even a lost orchestra.

The result was hard on Rafla. The sound was a rattle on the keys, a poor frame for a voice of her calibre. She is now no tweety bird or brave little thing with a promising voice. She is opening out into a true *lyrica-spinta*, and her repertoire could be extensive. So she is entirely within her rights to attempt the Strauss *Songs*, perilous though they be. Her voice is not really a *lieder* one; she belongs to opera. This is evident when the music demands a surge of tone. For most singers this is a problem. For Rafla, no problem at all. The voice takes on power and colour as demanded. Such voices as hers used to be called French, meaning powerful under pressure, bright and direct, with presence. She is a natural singer, gives out confidence and is happy to be on stage. Her manner for concerts is relaxed and full of style.

All sopranos think they must try the *Four Last Songs* — the young and voiceless, the old and toneless, *voix blanche*, *voix d'or*, worn out or merely weary. The *Four Last Songs* are Soprano with a capital S. When operatic people talk about Strauss, they talk about sopranos. He worshipped them as a species, even marrying one, a viperish harridan who spread terror through the operatic world with her tongue. The *Four Songs* were really last songs, and elusive. They totally elude merely lovely voices unless directed by extreme musicality. The hushed miracles of fading tone in them can be funereal if they do not soar aloft.

The *Songs* were unique in their first presentation, a historic world premiere in London's Albert Hall during the darkest days of the peace which followed the world war — the end of the frozen 40s. They were dedicated to and on this occasion sung by the greatest voice of the 20th century, Kirsten Flagstad, and were conducted by Wilhelm Furtwangler. The songs immediately soared into Elysium, a challenge to all those who came near, them, like a marvelous Himalaya beyond human dimensions. Rafla and her piano did their best, but it was like trying to move the looming mountain with a teaspoon.

Each of the songs has a word heading: Spring, September, Time to Sleep, then Dusk. They show states of being and they have specific colours — green, old gold and brown — as the years deepen and fade. Then the episode of the *Four Last Songs* takes off in reverse: instead of floating up, it slides ever down and through — intimations of the great release all human beings drift into. The chords of the music settle into dusk, that time into which even the gods move. There is so much done with so little — Titian again. A delicate dab of colour, and Strauss makes his earthly obeisance to Wagner. We descend further and deeper, but richer. The orchestra of Strauss never rests or repeats.

Then the last tones, chords gently, irrevocably indifferent to their effect. Indifference amid the oldest fable known to all of us on earth — death — closes over, obliterating all answers. Two larks high in the sky sing alone above the amethyst murk. Woodwinds and horns, Strauss's favored instruments, are like larks. What we had was the trilling on a nursery piano. In spite of everything, Rafla did well and managed the long melisma ending on low tones with eloquence.

The concert had begun, as so often happens with this type of evening, with Italian 18th century voice warmers. These are bar work for the singer to limber up on. They are all very much alike these songs: bright, cheery, with hints of lost lovers, and sentimental conclusions.

The Pergolesi *Si tu m'aimes* was done perfectly by piano and singer and Lotti's *Pur dicesti*, once a showpiece for 19th century divas to display their trills, was embroidery. This part of the concert ended with selections from Scarlatti's *Arianna*, a noble work for which Mona Rafla used her dark hues and gave demonstration of her changing status as a singer. There was much forthright declamation.

For this part of the concert the piano had been assisted by the El-Hamamsy trio: Walid El-Hamamsy, violin, Mustafa Abdel-Aziz, violin, and Hassan Moataz, cello. These players lent variety to the Italian songs, but did not perform in the second half.

The concert was founded on a very old fashioned model, but was updated by the dimensions of the second half. Late Strauss does not mix with anything. Its perfume is so subtle, all powerful and suggestive of an era — riven, shadowy, cruel, insane. The ravaging minotaur was loosed on society wearing Lanvin clothes, and blood spattered were the walls of middle Europe's palaces and castles. As Strauss had spun his last web of enchantment, had he ever thought of what was going on beneath the tapestry — the last rites of the unicorn?

Dark thoughts do not belong to Ravel's *Sheherazade* which ended the evening. It was written before the black hole of 1939. It is replete with ornate warnings. David Hales was needed here because, unlike Strauss, Ravel loved the piano. So his expertise came usefully to set a seal on Mona Rafla's concert. She was more at home with this music. Though there was no orchestra, its absence had less serious effects on the Ravel than on the Strauss. *La flute enchantée* could have done with more colour, though the voice shone in the meagre sound pattern.

Best was *L'indifferent*. A shiny flourish did the trick. The audience left the hall, the concert was over. Things might have been worse. We were in 1931, not 1939.

Books

Back issues breathe again

Al-Katib Al-Masri (The Egyptian Writer), vol I, ed Taha Hussein. Cairo: Al-Kitaba Al-Ukhra, 1998

It was in the wake of the Second World War and the redrawn map of the Middle East that *Al-Katib Al-Masri* magazine came into being, edited by no less than Taha Hussein. Its first issue was published in October 1945. The magazine continued until 1948, during which three years it left an indelible imprint not only on Egyptian but also on Arab culture in general. Most recently, Al-Kitaba Al-Ukhra has reprinted the first volume of the magazine, containing the first four issues of *Al-Katib Al-Masri*.

The editorial of the first issue, under the title "Programme", firmly places Egypt in a Mediterranean context, arguing that Egypt's history and its geographical position places it in the position of "a mediator between East and West in matters cultural, political and economic... This magazine is but one of Egypt's instruments for achieving this task and meeting this grave duty."

Taha Hussein belongs among a group of Egyptian intellectuals who saw Egypt's cultural identity as part of the Mediterranean, rather than the Arab world. It is not that the Arab dimension is overlooked — the editorial asserts, further down, that the magazine will provide a bridge between the Arab peoples and the peoples and nations of the West; but then the Arab orientation ranks second.

As for the editorial policy, this too was defined by Egypt's perceived role as cultural mediator. Hussein explains that Arabic literature in all its eras and manifestations would be given scope and nurtured on the pages of the magazine, just as Western literatures, both classical and modern, would be presented here to the Arab reader. He also pledges the magazine's commitment to giving "those young writers who are testing themselves and trying to participate in literary production" space on its pages. It was, then, a clear-cut, ambitious but also practicable programme.

The magazine's promise in the first issue to offer its readers the first, exclusive Arabic translation from texts by European and American writers was indeed fulfilled — as with Jean-Paul Sartre. Other Western writers included H G Wells and Andre Gide. Another promise made in the first issue was "The Egyptian Writer's Prize" for the short-story, the value of which was LE 100, in addition to the award-winning story being printed in the magazine. As for submissions for the award, "the writer is free to choose his subject-matter, without any constraints of time, place, environment or trend."



Taha Hussein

A glance through the table of contents of the first four issues shows that *Al-Katib Al-Masri* drew a list of contributors both established at the time and also destined to become famous later. These included Tewfik El-Hakim, Soheir El-Qalamawi, Hussein Fawzi, Louis Awad, Salama Moussa, Yehia Haqqi and Mohamed Mahdi El-Gawahri.

The topics tackled in the articles also testify to the broad understanding of culture as defined by the magazine. Mohamed Awad Mohamed discussed the new balance of power after the Second World War, Salama Moussa wrote about George Washington and American democracy, Louis Awad offered a critique of T S Eliot, Mohamed Mahmoud Ghali discussed the atomic bomb, among so many other subjects. Another service offered in *Al-Katib Al-Masri* for the first time, later to be copied by other cultural magazines, was the large review section which covered Arab and world literature, Western and Arab magazines, and so on.

The headquarters of this landmark magazine were 5 Qantarit Al-Dikka Street, Cairo. The annual subscription for Egypt and Sudan was 100 piastres; all other countries, 120 piastres. The reprint is a little more.

Reviewed by **Mahmoud El-Wardani**

Listings

EXHIBITIONS

David d'Agostino, Nazli Madkour
Akhnaton Gallery, Centre of Art, 1 Al-Maahad Al-Swissri St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8211. Daily exc Fri, 10am-1pm & 6-9pm. From 21 April -Until 10 May.
Installation with rope, nails, cloth and wall paintings from the former, shown under the title She Was Left Behind Among the Ruins, Whispering to the Birds, and 30 mixed media works exhibited under the collective title Palimpsest from the latter.

Adil Rizkallah
Espace Karim Francis, 1 El-Sherifein St, Downtown. Tel 393 1699. Daily exc Thu, 10am-2pm & 6-9pm.
Watercolours on paper.

Rehab Abdel-Rahim (Collages)
Indian Cultural Centre, 23 Talaat Harb, Downtown. Tel 393 3396.

Olmedo Quimbita
Cairo Opera House Gallery, Opera House grounds, Gezira. Tel 339 8144. Daily 9am-9pm. Until 18 April.
Paintings by the Ecuadorian artist.

Fayoum Portraits
Horizon Gallery, Mahmoud Khalil Museum, 1 Kafour El-Akhshid St, Dokki. Tel 357 5424. Daily exc Mon 10am-6pm.
All the Fayoum portraits in Egypt gathered together and beautifully displayed, alongside Ptolemaic funerary items.

Wahib Nassar (Paintings)
Mashrabiya Gallery, 8 Champollion St, Downtown. Tel 578 4494. Daily exc Fri, 11am-8pm. Until 23 April.

Ahmed Badawy (Jewelery) & **Ahmed Ragab Sakr** (Paintings)
Extra Gallery, Al-Nessim St, corner of Montaza St, Zamalek. Tel 340 6293. Daily exc Sun, 10.30am-2pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 23 April.

Maja Fredriesson (installations)
Cairo-Berlin Gallery, 17 Youssef Al-Guindi St, Bab Al-Louq. Tel 393 1764. Daily exc Sun, 12noon-3pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 24 April.

Jewelery Designs by Artists
Italian Cultural Institute, 3 Al-Sheikh Al-Marsafi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8791. Until 25 April.
Silver and gold jewelery encrusted with precious and semi-precious stones designed by Italian painters and sculptors.

Christian de Portzampare (Architectonic Studies)
Al-Hanager, Opera House grounds, Gezira. Tel 340 6861. Daily 10am-10pm. Until 26 April.

Linda Coln-Kobelecky (Paintings)
Ewart Gallery, Main Campus, AUC, Mohamed Mahmoud St. Tel 357 6373. Daily exc Fri, 9am-9pm. Until 30 April.

Gerhard Altenbourg (Drawings, woodcuttings, watercolours and lithographes)
Gallery of the Faculty of Fine Arts, 8 Ismail Mohamed St, Zamalek. 7pm. Daily 10am-2pm & 4pm-7pm. Until 30 April.

Jack Kilby (Photographs)
Sony Gallery, Main Campus, AUC, Al-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 5424. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 9am-12pm & 6pm-9pm. Until 7 May.
Works under the title Arab Jerusalem in the Shadows of the Noble Sanctuary.

Museum of Modern Egyptian Art
Opera House Grounds, Gezira. Tel 342 0601. Daily exc Mon, 10am-1pm & 5pm-9pm.
A permanent display of paintings and sculpture charting the modern art movement in Egypt.

Mohamed Nagui Museum
Château Pyramids, 9 Mahmoud Al-Guindi St, Giza.
A museum devoted to the paintings of Mohamed Nagui (1888-1956).

Mahmoud Mukhtar Museum
Tahrir St, Gezira. Daily exc Sun and Mon, 9am-1.30pm.
Permanent collection of works by the sculptor Mahmoud Mukhtar.

The Museum of Mr and Mrs Mohamed Mahmoud Khalil
1 Kafour El-Akhshid St, Dokki. Tel 357 5424. Daily exc Mon 10am-6pm.
Wideranging collection of 19th century French art including works by all the major impressionists and sculpture by Rodin.

FILMS

Italian Films
Italian Cultural Institute, 3 Al-Sheikh Al-Marsafi St, Zamalek. Tel 340 8791.
22 April, 7pm: **Carmen.** Rossi's film of Bizet's opera.
18 April, 7pm: **L'Innocente.** Visconti (1976).

Hungarian films
Goethe Institute, 5 Al-Bostan St, Downtown. 14 April. All films have English subtitles
16 April, 6.30pm. **The Prosecution.** Sandor Sara (1996)
21 April, 6.30pm. **Gulls and Gangsters.** Peter Basco (1996/7)
22 April, 6.30pm. **Escape.** Livia Gyarmanthy (1996)
23 April, 6.30pm. **School of Senses.** Andras Solyom (1995)

Japanese films
Japanese Cultural Centre, 105 Kasr El-Aini, Garden City.
16 April, 6pm. **Happy Birthday Mama.** Kazumari Takada (1980)

Notice:
Some commercial cinemas now change their programmes every Wednesday, others every Monday. The information provided is valid at the time of going to press. It is wise to check with the cinemas. Arabic films are seldom subtitled. For more information, contact the venue.

Daniella (Lace)
Drive In, entrance of Al-Shorouq City, Cairo-Ismailia desert road. Tel 012-219 0831. Daily 6pm, 9.30pm & midnight. Ramsis Hilton II, Corniche Al-Nil St. Tel 574 7435. Daily 1.30pm, 3.30pm & 6.30pm. Tiba I, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Normandy, 31 Al-Ahram St, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0254. Daily 12.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Odeon I, 4 Dr Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 2.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm. Cairo Sheraton, Al-Galaa St, Giza. Tel 360 6081. Daily 10.30am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm, 9pm & midnight. Metro, 35 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 393 3897. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Cosmos II, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Al-Salam, 65 Abdel-Hamid Badawi St, Heliopolis. Tel 293 1072. Daily 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Karim II, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 593 4830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm.

Mogrem Maa Martabet El-Sharaf (A Criminal with High Honours)
Sphinx, Sphinx Sq, Mohandessin. Tel 346 4017. Daily 8pm. Karim II, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 592 4830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Miami, 38 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

El-Batal (The Hero)
Cosmos I, 12 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 779 537. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Diana, 17 Al-Alfi St, Emadeddin, Downtown. Tel 592 4727. Daily, 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Rivoli I, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Tiba II, Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily 10.30am, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Radio, 24 Talaat Harb St, Downtown. Tel 575 6562. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. El-Haram, Al-Haram St, Giza. Tel 385 8358. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Roxy, Roxy Sq, Heliopolis. Tel 258 0344. Daily 10am, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Karim I, 15 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 592 4830. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. Tahrir, 112 Tahrir St, Dokki. Tel 335 4726. Daily 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Sa'et El-Enteqam (Time of Revenge)
Lido, 23 Emadeddin St, Downtown. Tel 593 4284. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.

Tamania Wa Arbe'in Saa Fi Isra'il (48 Hours in Israel)
Rivoli II, 26 July St, Downtown. Tel 575 5053. Daily 1pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm, 8pm & 10pm.

Ressala Ila Al-Wali (Message to the Wali)
Odeon III, 4 Dr Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 2.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm.

Ismailia Rayeh Gaey (Ismailia Back and Forth)
Odeon II, 4 Dr Abdel-Hamid Said St, Downtown. Tel 575 8797. Daily 10.30am, 2.30pm, 5.30pm & 8.30pm.

Titanic
Ramsis Hilton I, Corniche Al-Nil St. Tel 574 7436. Daily 10.30am, 1.30pm, 3.30pm, 6.30pm & 9.30pm. MGM Kolleyet Al-Nasr Sq, Maadi. Tel 352 3066. Daily 10.30am, 1pm, 6pm & 9pm.

DANCE

Les Ballets de Monte Carlo
Main Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 339 8144. Until 17 April, 8pm.
Performing Romeo and Juliet.

MUSIC

Egyptian Chamber Orchestra
Small Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 339 8144. 20 April, 8pm.
Swiss composer Charles Uzor conducts a programme including Frank Martin, Ravel, and, of course, himself. Soloists: Iman Mustafa, soprano; Olga Chakharova, harp.

Yehia Khalil
Gomhouriya Theatre, Gomhouriya St, Abdin. Tel 391 9956. 16&17 April, 7pm.
Khalil and co play jazz.

Oboe and Piano Recital
Small Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 339 8144. 16 April, 8pm.
David Hales and Mohamed Saleh play Telemann and Pascoli.

Cairo Symphony: 18 April

Piano Recital
Small Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 339 8144. 18 April, 8pm.
Compositions by Mendelsohn, Bartholdy and Schubert. Mahmoud El-Kalaawi plays Chopin, Scarletti and Liszt.

Young Musicians
Small Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 339 8144. 21 April, 8pm.
Programme unavailable.

Cairo Symphony Orchestra
Main Hall, Opera House, Gezira. Tel 339 8144. 18 April, 8pm.
Ahmed El-Saedi conducts Debussy and Richard Strauss.

THEATRE

Al-Tayeb Wal-Sherrir (The Good and The Bad)
Al-Salam Theatre, Qasr Al-Aini St. Tel 355 2484. Daily, 10pm.
Yehia El-Fakharani, Sawsan Badr, Mohamed Metwalli and Sayed Azmi perform under the direction of Ahmed Abdel-Halim, in a play scripted by Alfred Farag with songs written by Gamal Bekhit.

Alabanda
Al-Fardous Theatre, Al-Beouth Sq. Tel 482 3017. Daily 8.30pm; Thur 9.30pm.
With bellydancer Dina, Mona Abdel-Ghani, Sherif Mounir, Mohamed Heneidi, Alaa Waleieddin, Magda Zaki, Magda Zaki, Ahmed El-Saqqa, Ahmed Aql and Hani Ramzi.

LECTURES

The South Church of El-Ashmunein
Egypt Exploration Society, British Council Auditorium, 192 Sharia El-Nil, Agouza. Tel 301 8319. 21 April, 7pm.
Lecture by Dr Donald Bailey.

All information correct at time of going to press. However, it remains wise to check with venues first, since programmes, dates and times are subject to change at very short notice.
Please send information to Listings, *Al-Ahram Weekly*, Galaa St, Cairo. Tel 5786064. Fax 5786089/833.

Compiled by **Injy El-Kashef**

Around the galleries

EGYPTIAN and Dutch influences combine harmoniously in the 30 paintings by **Wahib Nassar** currently on exhibit at **Mashrabiya Gallery.** Ascetic in colour, these are nonetheless daring in composition and can best be described as abstract surrealist in style.



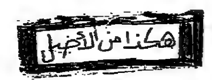
Wahib Nassar

The Round Gallery attached to the **Syndicate of Plastic Artists** hosts paintings by **Husseini Ali Mohamed.** Taking traditional quarters as their subject, these, though jam-packed with all manner of detail, achieve coherence through a rhythmical distribution of colour.

The Ahmed Maher Preparatory School for Boys is holding its annual exhibition of student paintings, textiles, woodwork and other crafts. These show remarkable maturity, proving that, given the right environment and an availability of material, creativity flourishes.

Watercolours, 25 in all, by **Emad Rizq** occupy gallery space at the **Atelier du Caire.** Well-executed, romantic in atmosphere, these include rural and urban landscapes and still lifes.

Reviewed by **Nagwa El-Ashri**



هكذا من الأصل

Theory and praxis revisited

In the second and final instalment of his lecture, delivered recently in Cairo, **Jürgen Harbermas** sketches the potential role of philosophy as the century closes

Before outlining these pragmatic roles of philosophy, let me mention one reservation in advance. There always remains a tension between social roles attributed to philosophy from outside, on one hand, and the perceptions from inside the philosophers' own perspective, on the other. The totalising view innate in all philosophical thought — be it only the view on the "whole" of some diffuse background of the life-world — resists any form of functional specification. Indeed, philosophy cannot completely immerse itself in one of its social roles; it can only fulfill one or the other specialised role by simultaneously transcending it. Were philosophy to correspond fully with one of those sharply defined functions based on a clear division of labour, then it would be robbed of its best, its anarchistic heritage, namely of the strength of a kind of untamed thinking that is neither channeled, nor fixed by method.

The pragmatic roles played by philosophy, and I now wish to outline them, result from a specific understanding of modern societies (which I have elaborated elsewhere). In this reading, culture, society and personality, as well as the private and public spheres of the life world, provide us with points of reference for the functions which philosophy can fulfil in contemporary societies.

The differentiation of the sciences from modern law, morality and art has changed philosophy's overall position in the whole of modern culture. Almost until the 17th century, the specialisation of knowledge took the form of differentiation within the frame of philosophy, as the encompassing science. Even then philosophy continued to claim that at least the "foundations" of knowledge remain its province. After Kant and Hegel, however, philosophy, as the discipline providing final justifications for any cognition, resigned step by step and retreated to the more modest role of a theory of science that provides justifications after the fact. From now on, philosophy is only able to react to the independent developments of sciences that have become autonomous. It nevertheless retained the institutional position within academia, in other words, among the sciences and humanities, not only out of habit but for systematic reasons.

Ever since Plato, philosophy had practiced conceptual analysis by means of anamnestic procedures. Thus, today it still tries to reconstruct pre-theoretical knowledge of common sense in order to elucidate the rational infrastructure of cognition, language and action. Stripped of fundamentalist claims, it enters into cooperation with other sciences. Frequently, philosophy serves only to keep a space open for empirical theories with strongly universalist approaches. Like the sciences, philosophy continues to focus on questions of truth, but unlike them it upholds an intrinsic link to law, morality and art. It investigates normative and evaluative issues from the internal perspective of those domains themselves. By taking the logic of questions of justice and, or, of taste seriously, by recognising the structure of moral feelings and aesthetic experiences, it preserves the unique ability to switch from the one discourse to the other, and to translate from the one expert's language into another. What we see here is that curious polyglot trait of philosophy, which enables it to preserve a certain unity for all the by now disparate elements of reason, without at the same time smoothing over the different aspects of validity — the truth of assertions, the legitimacy of moral or legal norms and the convincing appeal of a work of art. Philosophy manages to uphold this formal unity of a pluralised reason, not by virtue of some notion of the whole of beings, or by some concept of the universal good, for example, but thanks to its hermeneutic ability to transgress the boundaries between languages and discourses, while at the same time remaining sensitive to holistic contexts in their background. However, it never does philosophy good to abandon its co-operation with the sciences and to insist stubbornly on occupying a separate field and a method of its own, that is a sphere over and beyond the sciences, be it "philosophical faith", be it "life", be it "existential freedom", or "myth", or "being", as it unfolds in a metahistorical dimension of "events". Without the interface to science and without working on the problems it itself generates as a specialised discipline, philosophy would lose those insights of its own, which it needs, in order to fulfil its exoteric roles.

Before I go on to say something on how this place of philosophy within modern culture bears on the interesting role of the public intellectual, allow me to address briefly the role of the scientific expert and the role of a therapeutic agent offering access to a "meaningful life". Philosophy obviously has no exclusive claim to either of these roles. Philosophers must compete with other intellectuals and other types of knowledge that originate elsewhere.

The functional systems of modern societies depend on specialised knowledge, which they source, among other things, from experts. Thanks to their professional knowledge, experts are expected to provide advice on issues which are presented to them from the perspective of users wishing to apply such information. Applied knowledge, as it is generated by the relevant natural and social sciences, is primarily suited as a source of information on such "technical" questions. For such purposes, philosophical knowledge is in general as rarely demanded as the historical or hermeneutic interpretations provided by the humanities. Yet philosophers are at least consulted on some issues, on questions of methodology in the critical evaluation of competing expert's opinions, and, above all, on normative questions relating to ecology, medicine, or genetic engineering and generally, to the risks of using new technologies. In rare instances, issues touching on the ethical self-understanding of the political community are involved — for example, in parliamentary discussions of the criminal character of an overthrown political regime, or in questions of the best strategies for coping with an unmasterable past (trial and punishment vs forgiving and forgetting). If we think of the example of the meanwhile quite widespread and well-established ethics commissions which address questions of medical ethics, some of us might feel somewhat irritated. Acting as experts, philosophers will not have to engage in self-denial if, and only if, in response to the instrumentalisation of their knowledge, they are able to nurture a ready awareness of the limits of such expertise.

By contrast, philosophy seems to be well-equipped to meet people's private yearning for practical orientation and, as it were, a "meaningful life". Yet even here it cannot unreservedly fulfil such expectations. Since the modern condition is above all characterised by the acceptance of a legitimate plurality of world views, philosophers cannot take a stance for or against the substance of particular forms or projects of life. They cannot slake the thirst of the sons and daughters of Modernity by providing some surrogate for the lost certainties of religious belief or cosmological world-view. They have to leave it to the priests to provide comfort and consolation in existential conflicts. Philosophy can neither rely on a knowledge of salvation, nor on clinical knowledge and can, therefore, not provide "advice down the path of life" in the manner of either religion or clinical psychology. As ethics, it can give guidelines as how to reach a reasonable understanding of oneself on questions of identity, on questions of who one is and wishes to be. However, today the "therapeutic" role of philosophical ethics is, at best, to encourage people to lead a conscious life. Philosophical "advice" remains ascetic when it comes to demands for "imparting meaning": the responsibility for reflection on the meaning of a person's life has to remain with the person in question.

Philosophers have a wider-ranging ability to influence things in the role of public intellectuals than they do as experts or therapists. Intellectuals take part in those public discourses wherein modern societies try to reach an understanding of themselves. Various public spheres overlap or converge at the national level in a cultural and political public sphere conveyed by the mass media. This public space forms the sounding board for macro-social problems that can no longer be perceived from the perspective of closed, self-referential functional systems. In other words, the diffuse network of a public sphere anchored in civil society constitutes the location, where highly complex societies become aware of relevant failures and risks, and can deal politically with those problems, which push them to act upon themselves. Certainly, many actors are involved in addressing and handling public issues. We are interested here in one group of actors who stand out for the fact that they are neither asked nor delegated to intervene, but, instead, make unsolicited use of their professional abilities to offer more or less well-reasoned contributions on such issues of general interest. These intellectuals can, at best, rely on an authority which they acquire by dint of redeeming the ambitious claim to consider in each case all relevant points of view impartially, and to take all interests involved equally into account.

Certain questions philosophers are better prepared to handle than are other intellectuals, be they writers, professionals or scientists. First, philosophy can contribute something specific to the diagnosis of our times by which modern societies reach an understanding of themselves. For, ever since the late 18th century, the discourse of Modernity has primarily been conducted in the philosophical form of a self-critique of reason. Second, philosophy can fruitfully tap into its traditional holism and its polyglot abilities for more specific interpretations. Given that it maintains an intimate relation to both the sciences and to common sense, and that it understands the specialist languages of the expert cultures as well as it does the ordinary language of every-day life, philosophy can, for example, criticise the colonialisation of a life world which has been hollowed out by trends of commercialisation, bureaucratisation, legalisation and also scientisation. Third, philosophy has special competencies for basic issues of the "just" or well-ordered society. Philosophy and democracy not only share the same historical origins, in a way they are also dependent on each other. Philosophy has a special interest in the constitutional protection of the freedom of thought and communication while, conversely, a constantly endangered democratic discourse also depends on the vigilance and intervention of this public guardian of rationality.

In modern European history, political philosophy from Rousseau via Hegel and Marx, through to John Stuart Mill and Dewey, has established for itself a considerable influence on public life. A current example of the political need for philosophical clarification is the inter-cultural controversy over how we should understand human rights.

Today, as it grows ever more closely together, the community of nations is no longer compelled only to regulate "international" transactions. Under the pressure of economic globalisation, politics, too, must develop into a transnational system. It is also gradually becoming necessary to transform national law into "cosmopolitan" civil law on which people rely equally in their dealings within a state, and to which they can, if needed, appeal even vis-a-vis their own government. Human rights, as have been codified in various declarations, are suited to serve this purpose. Anyway, the controversy over the correct interpretation of human rights has intensified, against the background of the United Nation's human rights policies, pursued more actively since 1989. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, differences in outlook between the social systems have been reduced. In their place, inter-cultural differences have emerged — in particular between a secularised Western world and fundamentalist Islamic currents on the one hand, and between an individualistic West, and the communitarian Asian traditions on the other.

I cannot go into this debate in greater detail here. However, the example shows how philosophy could have a direct political influence. Allow me, in conclusion, to pin-point three key aspects of this particular debate where I believe philosophical clarification is both desirable and possible.

I would first of all propose that we reflect on the hermeneutic situation of the human rights debate itself, as it involves participants of different cultural backgrounds. This would draw our attention to normative contents that are already implicit in the presuppositions of an ongoing praxis of argumentation. For, irrespective of cultural background, all the participants intuitively know full well that a consensus based on insight is not possible if the relations between the participants in communication are not symmetrical — in other words, relations of reciprocal recognition, of mutual perspective — taking a jointly shared willingness also to see one's own traditions through the eyes of a stranger, to learn from one another, etc.

I believe it would then be useful to reflect on the concept of "subjective right" used in the conception of human rights. In this way, our reading of the debate between individualists and collectivists could bring a double misunderstanding to light. For possessive individualism in its Western guise fails to see that subjective rights can only be derived from the antecedent, intersubjectively recognised norms of a legal community. Subjective rights are, of course, part of the endowment enjoyed by individual legal persons under the rule of law; however the status of such persons as the bearers of subjective rights is first constituted in a political community based on mutual recognition. Now, by jettisoning the erroneous thesis that there is some individual who exists with innate rights prior to all socialisation we can, at the same time, abandon the antithesis, according to which the claims of a community has priority over the legal claims of individuals. The purported alternatives these two theoretical strategies afford dissolve in to nothing, if we incorporate the counter-directional unity of processes of individuation and socialisation into the core concepts of an intersubjective approach to legal theory: legal persons, too, only become individuals through socialisation.

Finally, it would be important to clarify the different grammatical roles played by ought-sentences and by value statements, as well as those played by normative and evaluative expressions in general. For deontological considerations of rights and duties must not be assimilated to axiological considerations of value preferences. Given the existentially irreconcilable life orientations of parties whose identities have been shaped in different forms of life and traditions, it will always be difficult for them to reach agreement — be it at the international level between different cultures or, within one and the same state, between different sub-cultural collectivities. Here, it is all the more helpful to remember that an agreement on obligatory norms (for reciprocal rights and duties) does not require the mutual esteem of different cultural achievements and life styles, but instead depends on the recognition that each person deserves equal respect and has the same value precisely as a person.

Published with the permission of the writer

Plain Talk

Yearbooks are usually dull and boring. One never actually reads them but refers to them for a bit of information or a figure. Not so *Britain 1997*. Those who compiled it must have been well-aware of the tedium associated with yearbooks, for they have gone out of their way to flesh out the volume with readable articles.

Indeed, in the introduction, the editor says that this year's book has an environmental axe to grind. Thus, Britain's response to the challenge of "sustainable development" is set a chapter to itself. To underscore the point, the yearbook is made entirely of recycled, chlorine-free paper.

I particularly enjoyed reading an article entitled "Visiting Wealth on the Nation". This is about tourism and the environment in Britain, a subject that was previously broached by Prince Philip. The article discusses the discrepancy between an industry which brings Britain an estimated 22.7 billion pounds sterling and the havoc wreaked on the environment by that very same source of income.

Written by the Earl of Bradford, the article deals with the question how "the conflicting demands of tourism and the environment [can] be reconciled". At the start of the next millennium, tourism will be the world's largest industry. Yet the article claims that tourism in Britain has lately declined from 6% of world tourism to 4.7%. The writer believes that more money should be spent on tourism promotion.

However, the article also proposes that national heritage needs protection from tourism and that in certain areas in Britain, some constraints need to be placed on tourism. The writer invokes the nightmare of coaches in historic towns like Canterbury, Oxford and York. Meanwhile, he argues that tourists should be encouraged to step out of London and visit attractions in other cities such as the National Exhibition Centre in Birmingham. The ordinary traveller should be invited to see more of Britain, he says.

Reading through this particular article, one cannot help noting the similarities between the situation in Britain and in Egypt. As hard as we in Egypt may be trying to encourage tourism, we are at the same time looking for ways and means too protect our heritage. Witness, for example, the latest moves to protect the Pyramid Plateau. But then, this is a subject deserving of a column unto itself.

Mursi Saad El-Din

Thespian bonanza

Nehad Selaiha is bowled over by the recent burst of dramatic energy



Do you remember the blistering sand storm which ripped through Cairo on 15 March. Maybe you don't. But for all the budding playwrights at the AUC that day will always be memorable. Not on account of the storm as you may think — though storms have always inspired dramatists, even the Khamaseen sand storms, but because on that day it was announced that Egyptian playwright Mohamed Salmawy had donated an annual award for playwriting in his name to the new "Famous for 15 Minutes New Plays Festival" launched by the AUC Department of Performing and Visual Arts on 12 March at Howard theatre. It consisted of five new 15-minute plays presented in one programme on the opening and closing nights, plus staged readings of three more new plays on the 14th. It officially ended on 15 March with the awards ceremony, held after the final performance, and the announcement of the winner of the Salmawy Award. However, the five new playlets proved so popular that an extra, unscheduled performance had to be given on the following day in response to public demand.

The festival is the brainchild of Tori Haring-Smith, the artistic director of the AUC Department of Performing and Visual Arts, and involves more than the mere vetting and staging of new plays. It is primarily concerned with developing the skills of emerging playwrights in workshops where they can, in Haring-Smith's words, "hear their words read, get reactions to their scripts, and consider ways of developing them." Why the 15 minute limit? Because, she explains, it "allows an in-depth, intensive look at one idea, much like a poem." Admittedly, this gives the project an educational slant; but what saves it from being simply a practical course in creative writing is that it does not limit itself to students; it involves graduates, members of staff and visiting artists in the workshops as well. It also brings together people from different generations, countries, cultural backgrounds and stages of experience and maturity — very much like an international, multi-cultural theatre workshop. It is a laudable, impressive and creatively ambitious project and I was deeply frustrated when the storm, which reduced visibility to near zero around The Academy of Arts where I was teaching that afternoon; plus my irritatingly sensitive eyes (which, like Othello's, decided on that occasion to "drop tears as fast as the Arabian trees their medicinal gum") prevented me from making the awards ceremony. But, fortunately, I caught the last performance of the five competing plays on the following day.

The Howard was overpacked with hardly enough oxygen to go round or any room to stand. I watched the whole performance painfully pressed against the door. Nonetheless, I would not have missed it.

Of the five plays, which followed each other in quick succession, with minimal sets and lighting effects, the winner of the Salmawy Award was *We Are In A Jug* by Tamer Mahdi, directed by Nermin Amin. It featured a young couple, chained together with a thick rope, in what looked like a cave or a cell, alternately squabbling, making up games to pass the time, and pining for freedom. The basic situation is not unlike Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* or, indeed, Mohamed Salmawy's *Two Down The Drain* which was a hit at the National a few years ago; but the end is infinitely more optimistic, and takes the form of a punch line that gives the situation a humourous twist and a completely different meaning. When the couple glimpse an opening and crawl out, we suddenly hear a male voice-over congratulating an invisible mother on giving birth to twins. *We Are In A Jug* may have the structure of a joke; but it is a clever joke, cunningly played on the audience, and not without a metaphoric element. The audience loved it and did not mind at all being tricked. All the same, I could not help wondering if the fact that it was the only play in Arabic (the rest were all in English) had in some way influenced its nomination for the award of best play of the festival.

My personal favourite was *Thin Air* by Tom Coash, directed by Francesca Amendolia, and superbly performed by Magda Abdou. Unlike his previous play, *Khamaseen*, which played at the Wallace in Cairo before taking off to the Edinburgh Festival last August, *Thin Air* is a one-woman show, a sensitive, poignant, psychological monologue which takes us through the mind, life and experience of a tightrope-walker. There are flashes of humour, but wintry and subdued. In *Khamaseen*, Coash proved what a magnificent talent he has for comedy and scathing satire, as well as for poetry and pathos. The encounter of a young American bride with Egyptian culture and language on one hand, and the American community in Egypt on the other, sparked off a riveting drama about love, betrayal, female solidarity and, above all, the need for human understanding, tolerance, respecting the other and embracing cultural differences. The humour which underpinned many of the scenes and confrontations, and broke out uproariously sometimes, not only balanced the seriousness of the issues raised and the grimness of the heroine's situation, but actually intensified them in a deliciously ironical way. The Khamaseen winds which blow throughout the play provide the atmosphere and form a rich, central metaphor. The same technique is obvious in *Thin Air* where the act of tightrope-walking, its thrills and hazards, becomes a poetic image which sums up and focuses the heroine's life and experience. Funny that Coash should be giving us this little gem of a play during the same season which inspired his earlier one and gave it its title.

The other three plays were *Me Jane* (by Francesca Amendolia, directed by Tom Coash), with the Jane of the title sitting in a tree in search of security; *Small Talk* (by Laila Rifaat, also directed by Coash), which centres on the lack of communication between parents and children, and different values and cultures; and *"99"* (by Vafa, directed by Tarek El-Eribi), where the mechanical reeling off of an interminable list of celebrities from all over the world willy-nilly expresses the levelling of all values and the confusion of the postmodernist age. All were taut, witty and great fun. The actors too, and the production crew did a great job; and thanks to their brisk efficiency, the performance of all five plays was accomplished in just one hour and a half. If it had gone on longer, we would have all suffocated.

In less than 10 days I was back at the AUC, this time to the Wallace theatre, to enjoy, in a double bill, Inji El-Solh's productions of Salmawy's *Next in Line* and *Come Back Tomorrow*. The plays (available in English) were done in their original Arabic, with a few minor additions and changes here and there; and though I had seen them professionally done before, I felt as if I was discovering them for the first time. *Next in Line* consists mainly of the verbal and physical interactions (cordial and hostile) of a group of people, from different classes and walks of life, waiting in an endless queue that never moves. We never know what they are waiting for, and neither do they; they have been there for so long they have forgotten, but they keep waiting for their turn which, of course, never comes. As their impatience rises, they grow more quarrelsome and eventually pick out a leader to keep the line in order. Soon enough the leader, who regally occupies the only available chair, becomes a tyrant.

This absurd queue, with its senseless fights and feuds and sudden deaths and disappearances, has been interpreted by some critics as an ironical metaphor for the absurdity of the human condition in which the only turn that never fails to come is one's turn to die. Others have seen it as a disguised political satire on modern Egyptian history and, more generally, on the kinds of attitudes that lead to the rise of dictators. But whatever the interpretation, the play derives its dramatic vitality and theatrical vigour from the broad but accurate delineation of its characters, its combination of wit, satire and farce, and the galloping tempo of the dialogue which contrasts sharply with the maddening immobility of the queue.

The second play, *Come Back Tomorrow*, is more sombre. A young man goes to a government office to get his travelling documents officially stamped. There, he is subjected to a series of absurd interrogations, mental assaults and crazy sexual demands, including an order to marry the male deputy head (who promptly dons a wedding dress in anticipation of the joyous event). Gradually, the thin crust of rational reality cracks and splinters, and what begins as a realistic comedy and a social satire reveals itself as a black, nightmarish farce, culminating in rape and murder. In the final scene, rather than stamp the young man's papers, the office head and his deputy rip off his clothes and in a euphemistic sequence denoting rape brutally crushes his body under a gigantic official stamp.

El-Solh directed with flair and precision, allowing her young and ebullient actors enough scope to be creative and foreground their skills and talents, while carefully playing them off against each other to enhance the comedy. As a dancer, choreographer and movement expert, she was able to create movement patterns and formations which subtly underlined the sense of absurdity that informs both plays. Nada Shalabi's sets helped her in this respect; they were quasi-realistic but extremely simple, leaving the space free for the actors while hinting at the fragile nature of what we call reality. But, in the final analysis, the real source of pleasure that evening were the young actors — their joy, enthusiasm, and infectious high spirits.

Sitting in judgement

It is widely believed that Islam forbids women from becoming judges. In the first part of her refutation, Zeinab Radwan, the first woman to serve as dean of Cairo University's Dar Al-Ulum (Fayoum branch), argues that misinterpretation is at the heart of the problem

The prescriptions of the Qur'an and the Sunna (literally, the right path, as determined by the Prophet's practice) are incontestably the authoritative sources, to be referred to in all matters that touch the lives of Muslims. The *fatwas* (legal opinions or interpretations) of jurists, on the other hand, are binding only insofar as they are instrumental in realising some good, and should be consulted only when no clear provision exists in questions covered by the Qur'an and Sunna. The very function of all *fatwas* is fundamentally the realisation of the common good, and is essentially contingent on spatial, temporal, social and economic considerations. Hence what may be considered to be the common good in a specific time and place may be quite the contrary in a different context. As proof, we may recall the case of *Imam* Al-Shaf'i. Having developed and established his doctrine of jurisprudence in Iraq, he felt the need to modify it substantially to realise the common good when he came to Egypt.

There is no text in the Holy Qur'an which prohibits women from assuming any position in society envisaged to generate a common good, provided the qualifications and requirements for the job are fulfilled. Unless there is the explicit designation that a man or woman are specifically intended, the principle of gender equality is the underlying assumption in all our endeavours.

No Qur'anic text bans women from assuming certain jobs which men perform. Quite the contrary, Qur'anic verses commend women's solidarity in public matters and their integral role in realising the public good. "The Believers, men and women, are protectors of one another: they enjoin what is just, and forbid what is evil, they observe regular, prayers, practice regular charity and obey God and His Apostle. On them will God pour His mercy: for God is exalted in power, Wise (*Surat Al-Tawba*, verse 71). The words, "Men and women are protectors of one another" is a clear indication of the equality of the genders within the wholeness of the state and the community, and greatly enhances the position of women.

The only qualification for one to become a judge, according to Qur'anic texts, is to possess the virtue of fairness. "When ye judge, between man and man, that ye judge with justice" (*Surat Al-Nisaa*, verse 57).

The Sunna, however, added a few qualifications for judges as follows:

First: No one shall sit to judge between people when he is angry.

Second: No one shall sit in judgement alone; regardless of the vastness of his knowledge, others must endorse the justifications for the sentence. If a person were to judge according to his knowledge alone, he may become the target of the charges nurtured in the hearts of Muslims.

Third: The Prophet has acknowledged the validity of judgement passed under oath and supported by the testimony of a single witness. According to the Prophet, the judge has competence in the sphere of men's rights, but God's rights are determined by God alone, and the judge has only to adjudicate on their application according to the conditions which God has prescribed.

We may therefore conclude the following:

First: There is no prohibition in the Qur'an or Sunna against women becoming judges.

Second: Instituting the principle that no judge shall rely on his knowledge alone suggests that no written code was available according to which acts are incriminated, a situation which vastly varies from the present. Today we have a civil code, a commercial code, etc. Each country has its own laws which regulate the actions of its citizens, specifying what acts are considered offences in the eyes of the law, and determining the penalties to be inflicted for undermining interests protected by the law. In other words, the scope of knowledge of a judge today is defined in terms of the thoroughness of his knowledge of the law prevailing in his country. Such knowledge of the law is attainable regardless of gender. In addition, a person who sits in judgement does not pass judgement according to his own opinion or personal inclinations, but is under the obligation to judge according to the provisions of the law and in abidance with its prescriptions. Testimonies set forth the facts on which judgement is based. These testimonies may be considered in light of the Prophet's assertion that the reasons given must be duly endorsed by witnesses. The testimonies are therefore the justifications for the operative part of the judgement. In case of a judgement which contradicts the law, the judge is recused and the judgement is challenged.

In some Islamic countries today, women are deprived of functioning as judges because the community itself undermines women's rights and deprives them of rights guaranteed by Islam. The denial of women's rights is neither corroborated by religious prescription nor based on any inherent incapacity in the faculties of women as women.

In the golden age of Islamic civilisation, women enjoyed legal rights which are denied them in our times. The second of the Rightly-guided caliphs, Umar Ibn Al-Khattab, appointed Layla Bint Abdallah Al-Adawiya to preside over the market court in Al-Madina, while the mother of the Abbassid Caliph Al-Muqtadir was the chief judge of Baghdad's highest court.

Today, there are women judges in a number of Islamic countries. In Morocco, statistics for 1993 show that there are 200 women in judiciary functions at different levels and in a variety of circuits all over the country. In addition to judges, women magistrates, record-keepers and court clerks at the provincial and local levels, in addition to office assistants, total 2,504 women as against 6,231 men — 28 per cent of the labour force in this sector. In Syria, only 25 women are employed in the judiciary and prosecution, as against 903 men. In Sudan, there are three women judges and three prosecutors.

While no prohibition exists in the Qur'an or Sunna against women's employment in the judiciary, the issue has been one of controversy between major jurists. Their arguments are founded on the following assumptions:

1. To sit in judgement is to officiate as the highest *imam*, or leader of the believers.
2. To judge between men requires a judicious mind and wide experience in matters of the world, and women are lacking in both.
3. By virtue of his position, a judge must mix with men in their capacities as adversaries or witnesses, which would be intolerable for women for fear of subjecting them to temptation or to contact with men.

Ibn Jarir Al-Tabari and Ibn Hazm considered it legal for a woman to be judge or ruler, with no reservations.

Abu Hanifa approved of women acting as judges, but only in civil matters, since a women's testimony in financial dealings is valid, whereas it is not so in cases involving divine statutes and the legal punishments pertaining thereto (*hudud*), criminal law and the administration of penalties.

The position of the majority of jurists against the admission of women into the judiciary is logically unsound. Sitting in judgement is not the same as presiding over the state. The proposition that a judge is at the level of the leader of the state, or supreme *imam*, is not founded on any text, and the difference between the two functions is sufficiently evident in terms of their nature. Leading the state is not at the level of adjudicating between two or more adversaries over a limited issue.

The statement that the function of a judge requires sound judgement, a condition excluding women, alludes to the Prophet's saying that women are mentally deficient. This saying, which is frequently cited, needs to be explained.

Muslim narrates that he heard Abdallah Ibn Umar report that he had heard the Prophet state: "'Ye women, give alms and ask for forgiveness, for I perceive that you bear an affinity to those who will go to hell.' A (wise) woman said, 'What is it we have which enhances our affinity to those going to hell?' He said, 'Cursing and seduction are your habit; in addition, the women I have known who are deficient in mind and devotion outnumber those endowed with sound reason.' The woman replied, 'What is it to be deficient in mind and religious devotion?' He said, 'A woman has a deficient mind, because the testimony of two women is equal to a man's, and she is deficient in religious devotion because she does not spend long nights in prayer, and does not observe the fast in Ramadan.'"

Next week: Why women are not "deficient in mind and religious devotion"


Aisha Ratib: In defence of women's equality

Objection, your honour

ALTHOUGH European and American women commonly serve as judges, writes Fayza Hassan, their Egyptian counterparts are still considered too irrational to exercise this function. Aisha Ratib, former minister of social affairs and ambassador for Egypt, was the first woman to combat this prejudice in the early '50s — and fail to attain her goal.

Throughout her university years, Ratib excelled. She studied international law with renowned jurist Hamed Sultan and graduated among the top five students from the Faculty of Law at the age of 21. After graduation, she found out that there were five vacancies for the post of assistant deputy at the State Council (Maglis Al-Dawla). She decided to apply and, in view of her excellent academic record, was accepted. Sanhouri Pasha approved her nomination, posting her in Alexandria.

To her surprise, however, on the first day of work, she found she had been turned down, because Hussein Pasha Sirri, then prime minister, had refused to ratify the appointment. Sirri had rejected her application because this avenue, which could eventually lead to a career as a judge, was not open to women. She was advised to turn her ambitions towards a post more appropriate to her gender, in the property registration bureau, which she refused at once. She chose private practice instead and entered the office of the Ratibs' family lawyer.

Aisha Ratib, however, was not about to take the first rejection of her budding career lying down. She instigated a lawsuit against Maglis Al-Dawla, accusing them of discrimination. Women's organisations, including the Feminist Union of Huda Sha'rawi, joined forces with her. In the meantime, the Faculty of Law announced that it was hiring lecturers. Ratib was quite sceptical. "If they refused to give me a junior position in Maglis Al-Dawla because I am a woman, how could I be allowed to become a lecturer?" She did apply, nevertheless, and the dean of the faculty interviewed her. "I will look into your case and make a favourable recommendation, but don't go suing us if you don't get the job," he joked. After some difficulties, Ratib became the first woman lecturer at the Faculty of Law, Cairo University. She went on to become the first woman minister of social affairs and the first woman ambassador, but, while it was apparently acceptable to entrust her with the welfare and reputation of her country, she remained excluded from a career in which the levels and consequences of decisions were far less important. Today, retired from the diplomatic corps, Ratib has gone back to teaching at the university.



Lifestyle changes

When we arrived in Sydney in the late '60s, we immediately fell in love with a district known as the Eastern Suburbs. It looked very much like the French Riviera, with its elegant villas and small apartment blocks. There were many cafés and little restaurants featuring such delicacies as Hungarian goulash, *sole meunière*, or *tripes à la mode de Caen*, and the streets were teeming with people of various nationalities, which reminded us of Alexandria in the good old days. We decided at once that this was where we were going to live, though, given the price of real estate in the area, it seemed doubtful at first that we would do more than dream about it. Luck was on our side, however, and the classified ads provided the answer to our prayers one Saturday morning. There was a two-bedroom apartment in a renovated building in the heart of our favourite quarter. The price, unbelievably, was within our means. At once, my husband decided that it was a sham and refused to call the agent. It took some time to convince him, but the following week, we were ushered into an old-fashioned, luxuriously appointed apartment that could be ours as soon as we signed the papers.

Furthermore, there was no fraud involved, as we found out when we proceeded with the purchase. Just plain good luck. There were high ceilings and thick walls, large windows, a delightful balcony and a state-of-the-art kitchen. What more could one wish for? Living a stone's throw from King's Cross, Sydney's famous entertainment district, did not disturb us in the least. What did we have to fear? We had opted for a trendy lifestyle and took our neighbours, the chic young ladies promenading beribboned poodles at sunset and the visiting servicemen, drunk on R and R, in our stride. We never met any of our neighbours, however, though we could not help but notice that they were somewhat accident-prone. Over the years, there had been one fatal heart attack, one attempted suicide, two fires (one the handiwork of an amateur but effective arsonist), a police chase and an arrest in the building, while rowdy parties, usually interrupted by the arrival of the cars equipped with howling sirens, periodically shook our walls in the wee hours.

It was none of our business, however. We looked the other way and enjoyed the huge park on the waterfront, the magnificent yachts moored in the marina, the convenience of the delicatessen open around the clock, and the good school around the corner. We could almost walk to work and had no trouble hiring a nice Hungarian babysitter who had her own car and picked up our daughter after school. We basked in the sun on our balcony and cooked gourmet dinners every evening.

One Sunday morning, however, our idyll was shattered. We were sitting on the balcony, having a cup of coffee before heading to the beach, when our daughter, then eight, remarked casually: "There's Brian with one of his mothers." Crossing the street, a fashionably dressed young woman was carrying a little boy in her arms. They looked quite normal to me. "Who is Brian?" I asked. Apparently, Brian had moved into the flat above ours with his father. He had a different mother every week, my daughter informed us. "His father gets bored with them, this is why he changes them so often," she elaborated. "Doesn't Daddy get bored with you?" she asked — almost wistfully, I thought. Pressed for more information, she gave us details, reluctantly at first, then warming to her subject, on the entire neighbourhood. Apparently, our trusted Hungarian babysitter, who spoke little English and did not enjoy cartoons on television, had been bored with the long afternoons. She had taken our daughter on frequent walks in the park, where she had met several of the poodle-toting young ladies and had eventually invited several of them to tea and a bit of gossip, at our house. "They speak Hungarian, of course," explained my daughter proudly, "but I understand everything they say. Isn't that nice? One of the ladies, the one who owns Oscar, has a real-life criminal in her house over there," she said, pointing at the building across the street. "Next week, Maria and I are going to visit her."

Sydney's North Shore was a different scene altogether in those days. There were no little cafés, no fashionable restaurants and the shops closed on Saturdays and Sundays. Solid suburban brick houses with large backyards were owned by regular suburban families with many children whose parents had little propensity to change partners. Our trendy friends promptly abandoned us, alleging carsickness on long trips. In the years that followed our move, I often insisted on stopping at our old flat. With the end of the Vietnam War, the servicemen had disappeared, and with them the owners of the manicured poodles. Brian was gone, maybe to live with his mother, and our daughter could no longer speak Hungarian. If only we had waited a little longer.

Fayza Hassan

Sufra Dayma

Bread for Easter

Ingredients:
4 cups all-purpose white flour
1 egg (beaten)
100 gms butter
1 tsp. dry yeast
Warm water to hold
1 tsp. salt

Method:
In a small bowl, mix the yeast with one tsp. of sugar and two tsp. of warm water. Stir to dissolve. Leave aside in a warm place to rise (approx. half an hour to one hour). In a large bowl add the flour, the butter and the salt. Blend in the butter either by fingers or a food processor until ingredients blend well. Add the egg and the risen yeast. Blend again, adding warm water as necessary. Knead the dough until it becomes non-sticky. Leave covered with a towel in a warm place for a couple of hours. The dough should be doubled in size. Pat by hand, removing it from the bowl. Divide into sections according to the form you desire (rolls, French loaf or in a rectangular cake mould). Make sure each section is void of air before forming it. This process takes place if you pat each section and roll it cylindrically tight and then form it. Place formed bread on a non-greased baking tray and leave in a warm place to rise for another hour. Bake bread in a hot pre-heated oven (250°C) for seven minutes then lower oven temperature to 200°C for 20 more minutes. Remove from oven and leave to cool.

Moushira Abdel-Malek

Restaurant review

The renegade baguette

Andrew Steele *encounters an impostor*

It has to be one of downtown's most pleasant venues, outside at Da Mario at the Nile Hilton. Set at one end of the *shisha*-and-snack terrace, beyond the braziers, the pretty red and white tablecloths and dark wood seating give the whole space the feel, be it somewhat contrived, of authentic Italy. The interior warms to the theme. Old Chianti bottles adorn the head-height shelving while the kitchen is open for all to scrutinise. A Latino guitarist, wired for sound, trills to the adoring masses. And masses there always seem to be — the best endorsement a venue can get.

Service was snappy and came with a smile, our drinks winging their way to our thirsty palates with time to spare. The menus at Da Mario used to consist of a rather cumbersome and extremely large take on a yellowing photograph album, complete with translucent paper page dividers and sepia snapshots of rural Italian life. These have been scaled down somewhat to a more conventional two-page spread which makes for less likelihood of restaurant elbow — the phenomenon whereby dining companions jab each other in the chest whilst attempting to leaf through an unwieldy bill of fare.

The starters came in fits and starts, the first two being a classic *Minestrone Alla Genovese*, packed with succulent vegetables. It had a delightful piquancy which veered towards the citric. The *Funghi All Aglio* was also rather fine — a pot of mushrooms in a very good, creamy sauce, herbed and gratinated and really rather toothsome. Number three was less spectacular, although let me qualify the following comments by saying it was perfectly edible. The *Bruschetta Assortita* came topped with a smooth and cheesy mozzarella, shrimps, anchovies, tomatoes and fresh basil respectively. Toothsome, you may well murmur, and indeed they would have been, had these toppings adorned something other than a sliced baguette! *Bruschetta* simply doesn't work on the dear old French stick, and the Nile Hilton, with their wonderful bakery, should know better. Two out of three ain't bad, as they say.

The main courses hit the spot. The *Petti Di Pollo Ripieno* encompassed chicken breasts stuffed with mushrooms and ricotta with a side order of *al dente* vegetables and a savoury glaze, which William proclaimed admirable. The *Pizza Primavera* was good, topped with assorted vegetables and more of that lasciviously stringy mozzarella. A little dry, but with the addition of drippings from the jug of olive oil on the table, Mohamed found it perky and pleasing. A good Italian joint can be spotted by the way it does its pasta, and Da Mario does its pasta with finesse. The simple delights of a *Spaghetti Carbonara* were mine for the munching; these being a lovely creamy *Alfredo* sauce, with heaps of parmesan and smoked beef ham. I licked the platter clean. A good choice, all in all, Da Mario at the Nile Hilton, pasta and pizza quite reasonably priced and a garden atmosphere all its own. Dinner for three with three Stellas came to a five-star hotel price of LE182 — no discount for French usurpers.

Da Mario at the Nile Hilton, Downtown
Tel: 5780666

Al-Ahram Weekly

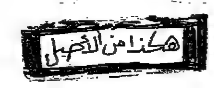
Crossword

By Samia Abdennour

ACROSS
1. Hoarfrost (4)
5. Of the lungs (5)
10. Be relieved from exertion (4)
14. Commotions (4)
15. Species of primrose (5)
16. Make-up case (4)
17. Cut off; shear (4)
18. Place for ducking obnoxious persons (9)
20. Affirmative (3)
21. Steep (4)
23. Skin disease caused by mites (5)
24. Endeavourer (5)
26. Hails! (4)
28. Container for salt, pepper, vinegar et al. (5)
30. Banished (8)
34. Gained (6)
36. Put faith in (4)
37. Facial feature (3)
39. Expectorate (4)
40. Clearly apparent (5)
42. M. Coty (4)
43. Bro's sibling (3)
44. Cop (4)
45. Glossy finish (6)
47. Assign as compliment, devote (8)
50. Lifeless (5)
51. Spool (4)
52. Enzyme that causes clotting of milk (5)
54. Greyish (5)
57. Window glass (4)
58. Kitten's father (3)
61. Washerwoman (9)
64. Bird's confinement (4)
65. Exchequer, state treasury (4)
66. French girlfriends (5)
68. God of war (4)
69. Dash, jumbled (4)
70. Immoral girl (5)
71. Whisky is distilled from their fermentation (4)

DOWN
1. Lively and vigourous in style (4)
2. Doing nothing (4)
3. Soften skin by use of cosmetics; dampen (10)
4. Sixth sense (3)
5. ... and behold (2)
6. A cattle carer (6)
7. Exhale; hit (4)
8. Atmosphere (3)
9. Rev/sec (9)
10. Banquet; full meal (6)
11. College in southern England (4)
12. Serenaded (4)
13. Current (4)
19. Coarse rock for polishing metals (5)
21. Puncture using teeth (4)
22. Musical note (2)
25. Occupy temporarily (4)
26. Mimic (4)
27. Quick movement in fencing to escape a thrust (5)
28. A levy or tax (4)
29. Expeditious (5)
31. Upright (5)
32. Rudimentary (10)
33. Railway eating car, small restaurant (5)
35. Music: softly and sweetly (5)
38. Assail; animal coat (4)
41. Small medicine bottle (4)
42. Indian princess (4)
44. Demon; malefactor (4)
46. Number of muses (4)
48. Imbue; saturate (6)
49. Effaces (6)
53. Printer's measure (2)
54. It represents the letter A in communications (4)
55. Spoken (4)
56. Dogfish as food (4)
57. Greek letter, pl. (4)
59. Double curve in architecture (4)
60. Disarray (4)
62. Ole (3)
63. Flightless Australian bird (3)
64. Roadster (3)
67. Steam yacht, abb. (2)

Last week's solution



هكذا من الأصل

Discover India's immense potential

"Made in India" Exhibition, 15-19 April 1998, Cairo International Conference Centre (Hall 1)

EGYPT has traditionally been one of India's most important trading partners in the African continent. In the Middle East, though Egypt has been taken over by GCC states in terms of bilateral trade, it still continues to occupy an important place. The Indo-Egypt Bilateral Trade Agreement operative since March 1978, and based on the standard Most Favoured Nation clause involving free trade in foreign exchange, has replaced the earlier Rupee Trade Agreement of 1953. The Indo-Egypt-Yugoslavia Tripartite Agreement, under which tariff concessions of up to 50 per cent were available for 129 commodities, expired on 31 March 1993, and has not been renewed ever since.

Indian exports to Egypt have been steadily increasing from $128 million in 1994 to over $223 million in 1997, an increase of almost 74 per cent in three years. The main Indian exports to Egypt have been cotton yarn and fabrics, machinery and equipment, transport equipment, articles of base metals including iron and steel, plastic and articles thereof, jute products, human vaccines, bulk drugs and pharmaceuticals, chemicals and allied products including reactive dyes, rubber and rubber products and traditional items such as tea, tobacco, sesame seeds and lentils.

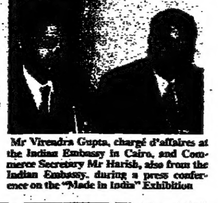
Egyptian exports to India in 1994 totaled $224 million. The Egyptian exports to India in 1994 soared extraordinarily due to the export of raw cotton. In 1997, Egyptian exports to India amounted to $187 million. The main exports to India are petroleum crude and petroleum products, raw cotton, organic and inorganic chemicals, metal ores and metal scrap. Thus as may be seen, the total bilateral trade has increased to $410 million in 1997 with the marginal balance of trade in favour of India by $36 million.

With the reduction of tariffs and deregulation of the business environment in Egypt, new trade opportunities have opened up for India exporters. Indian exports of cotton yarn and fabrics, paper and related products and the export of sesame seeds have seen a quantum increase in the last 2-3 years.

Indian companies won large contracts in Egypt during the last two years. These include a $30 million contract for the supply of hot briquetted iron (HBI) by ESSAR World Trade to National Iron & Steel Company of Egypt, a $20 million contract for the supply of boilers by BHEL for the Al-Arish 2x30MW power project, a $11 million contract for the supply of irrigation systems by Kirloskar Brothers, a $13 million contract for the supply of overhead transmission towers by KEC for Egypt-Jordan Transmission Line and a $3.5 million contract by TATA Exports for the supply of TV electronic components to Nasr TV.

With the deregulation of the financial environment and the liberalisation process in Egypt, an increasing number of Indian companies are looking at Egypt as a production base, both for domestic and regional markets. According to the Egyptian General Authority for Foreign Investment (EGAFE), India is the 12th largest investor in Egypt with total investment of approximately $330 million in 32 investment proposals.

Indo-Egyptian economic and commercial relations


Mr Virendra Gupta, chargé d'affaires at the Indian Embassy in Cairo, and Commerce Secretary Mr Harish, also from the Indian Embassy, during a press conference on the "Made in India" Exhibition

The most important of these, which has been a showpiece for the Indian Joint Ventures, has been the Alexandria Carbon Black Company, set up by Grasim India Limited, with TRENCO and ATC as Egyptian partners. ACB started its production with a 20,000 ton capacity in July 1994 and in July 1997, it increased its capacity to 75,000 tons. 90 per cent of its production is exported to over 30 countries. Its annual exports of LE120 million has made ACB the largest exporting Egyptian Chemical Company in the private sector, accounting for 3 per cent of total Egyptian exports. It is also one of the first Egyptian companies to obtain the ISO 9002 as well as the ISO 14001 accreditation for its environmental management system.

ESSEL of India and Mashoor Pack of Egypt have set up a joint venture for manufacturing laminated toothpaste tubes for the use of Proctor and Gamble in Egypt. Dabur India Ltd has started production of hair oils and other cosmetic products in a 100 per cent owned facility in 10th of Ramadan City. Nile Tex is a 100 per cent owned Indian company manufacturing PVC water storage tanks. M/S Auto Tech Engineering is another 100 per cent Indian company manufacturing auto valves. Kirloskar Brothers have got an approval for manufacturing diesel engines and irrigation pump sets in Egypt and have started production. TELCO has tied up with a local private sector company, ETAMCO, for assembling pick-up trucks, trucks and mini-buses. Bajaj Auto and Bajaj Tempo have teamed up with ELTRAMCO for assembling pick-up trucks and minibuses. Bajaj Auto and Bajaj Tempo have also hooked up with ELTRAMCO for assembling two-wheelers and Matador vans respectively. Ballarpur Industries Ltd have established a plant in Suez for manufacturing STPP, a detergent component, and Unit Trust of India has established a joint venture company in the field of Mutual Funds. Ranbaxy has an Egyptian subsidiary for manufacturing pharmaceutical formulations.

Nominations for various courses/training programmes under ITEC/SCAAP have focused on small scale industries, computer hardware and software development and training in the financial sector. A stabilised mud block (brick) making machine was granted to the Governorate of Aswan under ITEC in July 1996.

The Indo-Egyptian Joint Commission was established in September 1983 to promote bilateral cooperation for mutual benefit in agriculture, economy, trade, industry, education, health, culture, consular affairs, tourism and science and technology. Its first meeting was held in New Delhi in November 1985, the second in Cairo in October 1988 and the third in April 1997 in New Delhi. Apart from the meetings of the subcommittees of trade and economy, agriculture, science and technology, culture and human resource development, several agreements including agreements for foreign office consultations, air services, protection and promotion of investments, the establishment of a joint business council between FICCI, ASOCHAM on the one hand, and the Federation of Egyptian Chambers of Commerce, on the other, were also signed.

In January of this year, the Egyptian Minister of Trade and Supply Dr Ahmed Goweili led a high level delegation including top businessmen to participate in the CII Partnership Summit in Madras. During the visit an MOU was signed on trade promotion. Both sides are actively engaged in concluding a landmark partnership agreement.

During the visit of the Indian prime minister to Egypt in October 1997, an Indo-Egypt Joint Business Group was formed at the initative of Egyptian Prime Minister H.E. Kamal El-Ganzouri. The Joint Business Group comprises of top Indian and Egyptian businessmen and is aimed at forming new joint ventures and investment projects between the two countries.

India has stopped participation in the Cairo International Trade Fair since 1993. However, the Tea Board of India and other individual companies are participating in the fair. Handlooms and Handicrafts Export Promotion Council (HHEC) has been organising an exhibition-cum-sale of Indian jewellery since 1995. An exhibition held February of this year was very successful.

The mission, along with the India Trade Promotion Organisation (ITPO) is organising an Exclusive India Exhibition at the Cairo International Conference Centre (CICC) from 15-19 April 1998, to reduce the informational gap in the business community in Egypt regarding India's industrial and technological capabilities. Around 50 Indian companies from various fields of the industry will be taking part in the first ever exhibition of this type.

Mohamed Youssef Habib

Industrialisation in India since independence

ON THE night of 14 August 1947, India became independent. The Planning Commission was established in 1950 to attain a socialistic pattern of society. It framed the first Five Year Plan document in April 1951, with the sole objective of making the maximum use of limited resources. At that time, our country was primarily engaged in agriculture. The share of industry in national income was very small. Official estimates for 1948-1949 indicated that mining, factory establishments and small enterprises together contributed 17 per cent to the national income, the share of factory establishments (i.e. the organised sector of industry) was a meagre 6.4 per cent.

The industrial map of the country has changed dramatically during the last 50 years. Today, the contribution of industry to the total national income is more than that of agriculture and allied activities.

The bulk of our engineering industries such as cotton, textile machinery, jute mill machinery, sugar mill machinery, railway wagons, etc., were dependent on imports 50 years ago, but today we have attained almost self-sufficiency in most of these industries.

It may be recalled that we attained independence nearly two years after the end of World War II. Before the war, we used to import even the pins needed for files in offices. During the war period, there were shortages of these pins because the imports had stopped. Old bureaucrats still remember this incident. The wartime shortages continued till after the attainment of independence in such commodities as salt, sugar, vanaspati, cotton, cloth, etc. Most of these goods were rationed and the average citizen had to put up with these shortages for many years after 1947. The supply of most of these commodities is now more than the market demand and the era of shortages has become a part of history.

Our country has witnessed tremendous advancement in electrical engineering industries such as power transformers, electric motors, electric fans, electric lamps, radio receivers, television sets, computers, etc.

Chemical and allied industries such as fertilisers, soda ash, caustic soda, paper and paperboard, automobile tyres, petroleum products, medicines, etc., have marched ahead to satisfy the bulk of domestic demand.

The planning process initiated immediately after independence made it possible for the economy to make the most fruitful use of meagre available resources. The emphasis on the evolution of a socialistic pattern of society led to strengthening the public sector in steel, petroleum refineries, machine tools, fertilisers, pesticides, etc. The first four decades were utilised in inculcating the spirit of self-reliance which enabled us to venture into new fields.

Consequently, India is rated as one of the 10 leading industrialised countries of the world. The expansion in industry has resulted in all-round improvement in the level of living. A new industrial culture has taken shape in the country. The emphasis is on high productivity and efficiency so as to be able to compete in the world markets.

The initiation of economic reforms in 1991 gave a new direction to Indian industry which has resulted in the globalisation of both production and marketing. New units are being set up in various industries which tend to attain economies of scale through proper attention of size and technology. During the last six years, the number of industrial products on the export list has expanded enormously.

The policy of liberalisation and privatisation has attracted foreign capital to establish new industrial units possessing the latest technology. The pace of industrialisation has accelerated which in turn has speeded up the growth of the economy. The dismantling of the licence and permit system has encouraged the industrial units to import technology through collaborations and let the citizen have access to world-class goods and services thus giving a death blow to the craze for importing foreign consumer goods.

Change in industry is no longer slow and halting. The winds of change promise acquisition of new pastures of prosperity.

The flight through Daqadous?

There are dozens of well-known sites in the Delta associated with biblical accounts of the Holy Family's sojourn in Egypt. **Samir Naoum** traces the traditions that would place Daqadous among them

On the outskirts of Shubra El-Kheima in Qalyubiya province north of Cairo is a site that should perhaps be included in the itinerary of the Holy Family in Egypt. What in the past was mainly conjecture, supported by the convictions of the local population, is now, thanks to recent excavations, a racing certainty.

"Daqadous is a name sanctified by time," said Bishop Filobbos of Daqahliya. He suggests that the name of the town, "which is 'te-theou toucous', which means 'Mother of God' in Coptic, was first transliterated into Greek, becoming 'o tho kotous', which was then transformed into Docodous, or Dacadous, referring both to the town and the Holy Virgin," he said.

Daqadous as we know it today is situated on the eastern bank of the Nile and is famous for its church which was built on the site of three ancient churches. "Two are said to have disappeared as a result of a particularly high flood, and the surviving church is a veritable treasure house," said the bishop.

The sanctuary screen is exquisite in design, proportion and craftsmanship, consisting of several pieces of cone-shaped wood, tightly interlocked without the use of nails or glue. There is also a large collection of icons in the church, dating from various periods, some 100 manuscripts from the sixth century, a Bible exquisitely bound in silver, crucifixes and censers.

According to tradition, when the Holy Family set off from Bethlehem en route to Egypt, they passed through northern Sinai and the Delta before heading south through Old Cairo towards Upper Egypt. One of the sites around which a tradition developed over the years, subsequently to be woven into the timeless beliefs of the local population, was Daqadous. However, unlike such sites as the Tree of the Virgin at Mataria, where there is an actual tree, the church of the Holy Virgin at Maadi, where a flight of stairs leads down to the Nile where a boat is believed to have taken the Holy Family to Upper Egypt, and Sakha in the Delta, where a stone said to bear the imprint of Jesus' foot has been found, Daqadous had no material remains to add credence to the story.

Nevertheless, the church of the Holy Virgin has been sanctified by time. It may have been founded by Queen Helena, wife of Constantine, who journeyed to Egypt in the fourth century AD to visit the sites associated with the Holy Family, building churches as she went. There is now every indication that the church at Daqadous is one of Helena's foundations.

Excavation of the site some years ago resulted in the discovery of the remains of an early church beneath the present building (which dates from 1888), complete with numerous manuscripts, fragments of several ancient altars beneath the eastern wall of the sanctuary, and Coptic graffiti on the walls including a motif like the sun. Other ancient remains in the village include a well which is still used to draw water today.



Holy Family in Egypt

ALTHOUGH Biblical tradition holds that the Holy Family spent three years in Egypt, Islam says it was seven.

Members of the family travelled across northern Sinai to the Delta and Wadi Natrun and then south again to Old Cairo. From Maadi, a suburb to the south, they took a boat to Upper Egypt where many sites are associated with their visit. At first, they are believed to have lived in a cave, then in a reed house built by Joseph at the El-Qousqam Mountains near the site where the monastery known as El-Muharraq now stands.

This unique icon shows the Virgin Mary holding the hand of Jesus, depicted as a young boy rather than as a child on his mother's lap. Joseph guides a donkey and Archangel Gabriel leads the way.

Site tours

Buses

Super Jet, East Delta and West Delta buses operate throughout Egypt.

Super Jet

Super Jet stations are located in Almaza (Heliopolis), Tahrir, Giza, Ramsis Street and Cairo Airport. Buses travel to Alexandria, Port Said, Hurghada and Sinai. Tel. 772-663.

Cairo-Alexandria
Services almost every half hour from 5.30am to 10pm, from Tahrir, then Giza, Almaza and the airport. Tickets LE19 until 9pm; LE21 thereafter, from the airport LE24 until 5pm; LE30 thereafter. A VIP bus with phone access leaves Almaza at 7.15am. Tickets from Almaza LE28; from the airport LE32 each way.

Cairo-Marsa Matrouh
Services at 7am departure and 7pm return from Almaza and Tahrir Square. Tickets LE36.
Cairo-Sidi Abdel-Rahman
Services at 6.30am, 7am, 8am, 9am and 3.45pm. Tickets LE32
Cairo-Port Said
Services every half hour from 6am to 8am; then 9am, 10am, 3pm, and 4.30pm, from Almaza, then Ramsis Street, Tickets LE15 each way.

Alexandria-Port Said
Service 6.45am, from Ramleh Square in Alexandria. Departs Port Said 3.30pm. Tickets LE22 each way.

Cairo-Hurghada
Services 8am and 2pm, from Tahrir, then Giza and Almaza. Departs Hurghada noon and 5pm. Tickets LE40 until 5pm, LE45 thereafter, both each way.

Alexandria-Hurghada
Service 8pm, from Ramleh Square, Alexandria. Departs Hurghada 2.30pm. Tickets LE60 each way.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh
Service 11pm, from Tahrir, then Almaza. Departs Sharm El-Sheikh 11pm. Tickets LE50 each way.

Trains

Trains run to Alexandria, Port Said, Luxor and Aswan, from Ramsis Station. Tel. 147 or 575-3555.

Cairo-Luxor-Aswan
"French" deluxe trains with sleepers
Services to Luxor and Aswan 7.40pm and 9pm (reaching Luxor 6.40am and 8am, Aswan 8.40am and 10am). Tickets to Luxor LE294 for foreigners and LE129 for Egyptians; to Aswan LE300 for foreigners; LE141 for Egyptians.
"Spanish" deluxe trains without sleepers
Services to Luxor and Aswan 6.45pm, 8.45pm and 9.45pm. Tickets to Luxor: first class LE51; second class LE31. Tickets to Aswan: first class LE63; second class LE37.

Cairo-Alexandria
"Torbini" trains
VIP train: Service 8am. Tickets first class LE32 with a meal; LE22 without a meal.
Standard trains: Services 9am, 11am, noon, 5pm and 7pm. Tickets first class LE22; second class LE17.
"French" trains
Services hourly from 6am to 10.30pm. Tickets first class LE20; second class LE12.

Cairo-Port Said
Services 6.20am and 8.45am. Tickets first class LE45; second class LE26.

EgyptAir

There are between two and five domestic flights daily. Check EgyptAir: Adly 390-0999; Opera 390-2444; or Hilton 772410.

Cairo-Aswan
Tickets LE346 for Egyptians,LE1145 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Luxor
Tickets LE254 for Egyptians, LE831 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Hurghada
Tickets LE279 for Egyptians, LE899 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Cairo-Sharm El-Sheikh
Tickets LE287 for Egyptians, LE947 for foreigners, both round-trip.

Compiled by **Rehab Saad**

Monasteries in the middle

Despite restrictions on travel to the south, sites continue to receive visitors, but not in sufficient numbers. *Al-Ahram Weekly* takes a look at two famous monasteries in Middle Egypt

The White Monastery, an important Coptic site, was built in the second half of the fourth century

The monumental baptistery

"Tourist companies are still wary of providing information about sites in Middle Egypt, and without promotion how can we expect people to visit these places?" asked Father Antonious El-Shenudi who is responsible for organising and receiving tourist groups at the White and Red monasteries. Delighted at last to have someone with whom to share his expertise, he personally accompanied **Rania Abdel-Rahman** around this famous site in the desert, west of Sohag.

"This monastery is known as the White Monastery because it is constructed of white limestone; the Red Monastery is made of red brick," said Father El-Shenudi. The former is a monumental structure, one of the most important sites in all Egypt. "It was built in the second half of the fourth century by one of the pillars of Coptic monasticism, Saint Shenuda," he said. Indeed, the Church of Saint Shenuda occupies the largest part of the monastery. Tall granite columns and other architectural elements were ingeniously recycled from neighbouring monuments. "You can see how splendid it was by the number of elegant columns, 36 in number, characteristic of large churches built at that time," said our guide. "A century after its construction, it accommodated 4,000 monks and 1,500 nuns."

We entered the monastery via a small doorway which is covered for protection. On the left of the reception area we passed a kitchen where the monks prepared their meals and then, through a second larger doorway, we entered the main body of the church.

We saw the ruins of an old pulpit, as well as evidence that the church was once a two-story structure. "The plan is based on the form of Noah's Ark, rectangular in shape," said Father El-Shenudi. "At the top of the courtyard you can see the outlines of the roof which was in the shape of a dome, but was destroyed in the 18th century."

Standing in the courtyard facing west towards the baptistery, our guide pointed out a block of stone, one of several taken from a pharaonic temple, bearing reliefs of three gods, Isis, Horus and Osiris. A stairway took us up to a passageway which led to an old well about 30 metres deep and dating from the time of the original construction, which now contains about five metres of water.

The original iconostasis which separates the main body of the church from the altar is still largely intact and has three doors. The central, highest doorway, has three crosses above it as well as windows that once held icons. To the right, a new iconostasis leads to the main altar above which is a representation of Christ carrying the Bible. He raises his right hand in blessing. "Jesus Christ is shown in a circle with four protruding parts, each taking the shape of one of the four creatures of the Apocalypse: lion, calf, man and eagle," explained Father El-Shenudi. "To the top right are icons of Christ, the shroud, the Marys and the disciples."

The Red Monastery lies only a small distance away. En route Father El-Shenudi talked about the differences between the two structures. "Where we are going we will find a much smaller monastery, less than half the size of the White Monastery, with a shallower well, no pulpit, and no surviving columns above ground level. Also, the wall that once divided the main body of the church from the sanctuary was removed about 20 years ago," he said.

Unlike the White Monastery which lies in the desert, the Red Monastery is built in the middle of a village. It is surrounded by palm trees that add a colourful touch. The entrance is built of limestone. It proved to be much as Father El-Shenudi had described it. "It was founded by Father Pjol, Saint Shenuda's uncle, who came to live in the area, then called Adrebis, in the first half of the third century," he explained. "He came with a small group of monks and was joined by Saint Bishoy. In fact, the monastery was first called the Monastery of Saint Bishoy by the Arab historian El-Makrizi," said our guide, who went on to explain that the original church had been built in the fourth century by the Empress Helena who also had the defensive wall erected.

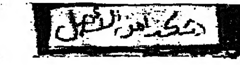
Father El-Shenudi pointed to evidence that the main body of the church was originally on three levels. Closer observation revealed remnants of the floors still embedded in the walls. "The monastery fell into disrepair and the body of the church became this courtyard," he explained.

The former sanctuary, where only priests and deacons could enter, is now the church. "Remnants of the original iconostasis of red brick have been incorporated into the present-day altar," said the father, who also pointed to evidence of icons on the walls. "The most famous icon is that of the cross and the shroud," he added.

Father El-Shenudi also drew attention to the *qasr*, the keep, where the monks could take refuge when under attack. The windows, narrow on the outside and wide on the inside, "create an angled surface that spreads light across the room," he said. "It also keeps the room cool, as the lighting is indirect and, of course, it enables the occupants of the room to see out without being seen."



The Red Monastery lies in the middle of a village surrounded by palm trees





Ahli's Ali Maher in possession of the ball in his team's match against Baladiyet Mehalla

photo: Amr Gamal

Unblocked rockets

The 21st week of the league was an interesting one, as the two top teams, Ahli and Zamalek, continue duelling to see who will come top. Abeer Anwar watched from the sidelines

Zamalek were lucky this week, celebrating the Eid event with two great victories — qualifying for the 16th round of the CAF Cup and teaching Ismaili a lesson in the league. This latter was something of a miracle for Zamalek, as their opponents are a club with great experience who were once the runners-up in the league. Nor was victory achieved by the usual means, though this only seemed to make it more delicious, when Zamalek's Medhat Abdel-Hadi rescued his team from a draw by scoring their second goal in the second minute of injury time to win the match 2-1. "It is the most wonderful goal we have ever seen," said one fan. "It's a rocket that can't be blocked," said another. As for Abdel-Hadi, he simply said," It is the best goal I ever scored for two reasons: first, because it was unblocked, and second, because it got my team out of losing three valuable points which have narrowed the difference between us and our arch-rivals, Ahli." Ismaili had gone into the match with the hope of improving their recent form after being knocked out of the 32nd round of the African Cup Winners' Cup by Red Sea of Eritrea. The battle was bound to be a tough one. In the first half, Zamalek's new star Abdel-Hamid Bassiouni scored in the 13th minute, but their defence just wasn't strong enough, and nine minutes later Ismaili's Mohamed Salah Abu-Gerisha sneaked through to draw. The 30,000 *Zamalkawi* who had filled the terraces of Cairo Stadium seemed depressed after losing this early advantage, and some left the stands before the end, having despaired of finding any consolation. But Abdel-Hadi was determined to cheer up the fans who had left their families during Eid to cheer his team on. After the second goal, police were powerless to stop the pitch invasion, as the fans celebrated by carrying Abdel-Hadi around the ground on their shoulders. Only two points then separated Zamalek on 41 points from Ahli.

But catching Ahli may not be as easy as the *Zamalkawi* hope. Their rivals are still full of determination, beating Baladiat El-Mahalla to raise their lead to 5 points. Ali Maher, spearhead of the Ahli attack, scored both goals, one in each half. The first goal amazed the opponents and set them on the attack, but all their efforts were fruitless. Ibrahim Hassan put in a fine performance, as if trying to compensate for the absence of his twin brother, Hossam, who is suspended. Yet Ahli still seemed very tired. Reiner Tsobel, Ahli's new Dutch technical manager, attributed this to the effort of winning the Arab Cup. He added, "I am very satisfied with the team's performance. The players know it is their duty to try hard to win the league." Meanwhile, Mohsen Refae, technical manager of Baladiat Al-Mahalla, commented, "I think my players did their best, especially considering that they are very young and are not yet fully-honed professionals."

In the week's other matches, Qena beat Suez 1-0, Mansoura beat Arab Contractors 3-1, Minya beat Suez 3-2, Masri drew with Aswan 2-2, Itihad Othman drew with Shams 1-1 and Alexandria's Itihad drew with Gazl El-Mahalla 0-0.

Out of her basket

Combining mind and body exercises to enhance one's sense of well-being has been a growing trend in the United States over the last two years. Now it's hitting Cairo. Eman Abdel-Moeti experiences the new E-motion

Being fit isn't the issue anymore. What matters is 'wellness'. That's the new term for sustaining a healthy mind as well as a healthy body. Aerobics instructors and exercise experts have discovered that a physically fit body can be suffering from emotional or mental stress which can greatly hamper physical performance. But yoga and Tao sports, which have long been known to enhance the power of the mind, still seem too 'soft' and too boring for many people.

Recently, a number of mind and body exercise experts in the United States sat down together to elaborate a combination of mind and body exercises. Some of them went on to publish books designed to help others enhance their well-being and improve their skills in life and sports, while others applied the same ideas to the classes they taught. These classes often bear quite different names, but they all have the same aim.

Laura Sachs is one of those who prefer teaching to writing. She calls the subject of her classes E-motion. Sachs studied aerobics, yoga and aromatherapy. She realised that regulating motion through mental meditation and reflection could be a great stress relief and could help change a person's perspective on certain aspects of their life. In her 40-minute class, participants go through a warm-up routine of "sensory awareness", where they create space around their bodies and move within that space in motions which reflect the emotions of stress. The motions are then patterned into a cardiovascular workout which relieves stress and at the same time burns fat. The final part is the cool-down, a hatha yoga and relaxation segment through which participants reach a mental state embodying feelings of self-worth and content.

Learning from Sachs, Egyptian aerobics instructor Rawya El-Gammal has adopted the same E-motion routine with slight modifications to fit the Egyptian mentality. "The concept of combining yoga arts with aerobics was not clear to the Egyptians. They had to try it for themselves to be able to judge it," she explained. El-Gammal started offering the E-motion classes six months ago. With only one session a week, El-Gammal started out with two participants. Fortunately, both enjoyed it very much.

As time has gone on, more and more people have been drawn to this new type of exercise, for many different reasons. Heba, who is 16 years old, plays tennis and works out three times a week, says, "Going once a week to the E-motion class helps me deal with what is to come. The exercises are not strenuous for me after my tennis class, and at the same time it helps my mind to explore my inner feelings, identify them and work my way through them. Then I'm prepared to face the coming week."

When El-Gammal has teenagers in her class, she takes the opportunity to address feelings which only they have to face. Speaking in her soft voice through the mike against a background of relaxing music, she guides the participants through the different steps. Gradually, she helps them get rid of the bad feelings and replace them with good feelings.

For working women like Noha, the E-motion class is like "going to a beach where you fill your senses with the sight of blue waters, the smell of fresh air and the caress of warm sun. Then you come back and you are ready for another week of everyday life."

Through the warm-up phase, Rawya guides the participants to create and identify the space around them, both physically and mentally. Then she asks them to imagine themselves in a nice place, the sort of place where they would like to take refuge when they feel stressed. With this beautiful image in their minds, the participants are then asked certain questions that stir and build up their bad feelings of dislike or hatred or suppression. As the participants move on to the cardiovascular work-out, they let go of their bad feelings through expressive motions which are rather like modern dance, by pretending their problems are merely objects they can gather in a basket and get rid of. This leads into a fast-paced constant escalation of movement, in which they gather good feelings into new baskets and thus acquire strength and happiness in place of their previous depression and helplessness.

Their mood actually changes from bad to good as the movements accelerate and everyone feels the freedom of self-expression as they perform these elegant aerobics exercises. Building on the new mood of happiness and self-confidence, the cool-down section emphasises those new positive feelings.

In the United States, there are many books which explain how to combine mind and body exercises so as to help others get through their lives with the least possible complications. But Sachs is one of very few who has applied such a philosophy in her classes. As she herself puts it, "E-motion is a comprehensive form of exercise designed to encourage self-regulation. I define self-regulation as the habits we organise our life around. When and what we eat, how often we exercise, the healthy pleasure we enjoy and how we manage a healthy lifestyle. As one goes from the concept of 'working out' into the broader concept of lifestyle management, one no longer desires to use up energy, but rather to enhance one's sense of well-being." Now, thanks to El-Gammal, Egyptian women, too, are beginning to make contact again with their own inner 'wellness'.

Smashing!

The first national tennis tournament for superstar hopefuls opened in Heliopolis last week. Nashwa Abdel-Tawab serves up an ace

Last week, 1,000 youngsters throughout the country gathered at the Smash Tennis Academy in Heliopolis to participate in the first national tournament to be organised by the academy. The academy is the first private tennis school in Egypt to offer all its juniors the kinds of facilities that might end up producing another Pete Sampras or Martina Hingis. Players will be competing for two weeks in more than one competition: under-12, under-14, under-16, under-18 and senior categories for both men and women.

Omar Makram Othman is Smash's chairman of the board while managers Amr Salali and Amr Sonbati are its owners. The tournament is being supervised by the Egyptian Tennis Federation (ETF).

In an attempt to raise the level of tennis in Egypt, Smash has seven high-quality clay courts with a track and gymnastics, class and video rooms scattered over three feddans. "We aimed at establishing a tennis academy for the welfare of the country in the hope of following in the footsteps of the famous Bollittari Academy in the US," said Sonbati. Both Salali and Sonbati were national team players and were the first Egyptians to travel to Bollittari and Van Dermeer to take training courses. Having travelled so far, the pair decided it was time to set up the first private tennis centre in Egypt. As for the academy's name, it comes from the smash, that well-known tennis stroke.

Last summer the academy hosted instructors from Bollittari to train 70 young players in a two-week session. The camp will be held again next June. The academy also organised the first Arab International under-18 competition last year.

Edited by **Inas Mazhar**

World Cup briefs

WIDELY criticised South African coach Phillipe Troussier has an unlikely ally. Neil Tovey, the former national side captain so far ignored for a place in this year's World Cup squad, writing in a column in the *Sunday Times* newspaper, said South African reporters should get used to Troussier's closed policy regarding the media. Troussier has been criticised for refusing to talk to the media after training camp sessions last week, and then conducting a news conference in French, through an interpreter, even though he speaks English. But Tovey, who was left out of two training camp squads from which the World Cup team will be chosen, said Troussier's predecessors sometimes suffered from being too open with the media. "The media have suddenly realised that the previous coaches were not that bad, after all," Tovey said in reference to Clive Barker and Jomo Sono. Barker resigned in December, amid much media criticism of his approach, and was replaced by Sono as interim coach until Troussier was free of a contract with Burkina Faso and could take over in March. Tovey said Troussier's "closed-book" approach was the norm in most soccer nations. He called on the South African Football Association to try to "get the media used to the new approach." South Africa, banned from international soccer for almost three decades until 1992 because of apartheid, will be playing in its first World Cup. It is in pool C in the opening round along with host nation France, Denmark and Saudi Arabia.

FORMER Dutch international Ruud Gullit, fired in February as player-manager by English side Chelsea, is becoming a newspaper journalist. Gullit will write a column for Sunday's *The Observer*, which has announced plans to expand it sports section. Gullit is already a familiar face in the British media. Earlier he announced plans to jump from the BBC to a soccer's commentator's job with ITV, one of Britain's three commercial stations. Gullit, who led Chelsea to the FA Cup title last season, will make his ITV debut at this year's FA Cup final on 16 May between gorgeous, masterly Newcastle and drab, foot-dragging Arsenal.

BRITISH Foreign Secretary Robin Cook hopes to keep Nigerian military leader Gen. Sani Abacha from attending this summer's World Cup. Cook, speaking to the Sunday *Observer*, said Abacha should be prevented from using a loophole in European sanctions against Nigeria to attend soccer's showcase in France. Cook said he would press French authorities on the matter. A Foreign Office spokesman, speaking for Cook, said "he hopes it will not be possible for some figures in the regime to find a loophole that will enable them to come to France." Glenys Kinnock, a member of the European Parliament, has urged English and Scottish fans to wear black armbands if they attend a Nigeria match. Abacha will seek election as a civilian president just a month after the World Cup ends. Opponents say he will use his presence at the World Cup as a campaign tool.

FRENCH World Cup host city St. Etienne was advertising on the Internet for "real Scots" who would come and put on a demonstration of traditional sports and music. Success! Fifty residents of Scotland's far northwestern Outer Hebrides Islands answered the call and have won a trip to the World Cup for the June 23 Scotland vs. Morocco match. The Scottish visitors will introduce the French to caber tossing, bagpipe playing, highland dancing and whisky drinking. The French are providing the lodging, but the tourists will have to arrange their own transportation.

THE BRAZILIAN national team's technical coordinator is confident his team will beat Argentina in an upcoming exhibition game, but even a loss shouldn't affect Brazil's chances in the World Cup, *Jornal do Brasil* reported. "It would be very good to beat Argentina but it won't change our plans for the World Cup," Zico told reporters. Brazil and Argentina will play on 29 April in Rio's Maracana Stadium. "In 1981 I travelled with the national team and we beat England, Germany and France, and it didn't help anything," said Zico. "We went to the World Cup the next year and left halfway through. I would have preferred we lost the exhibition games and won the cup, but the opposite happened." Zico also praised recent on-field performances by midfielder Rai, of Paris St. Germain, and striker Muller, of Brazil's Santos, saying the two were excellent candidates for the national team.

COLOGNE striker Ioan Vladoiu said on Monday he would not after all play for Romania in the World Cup finals. Last week Vladoiu and coach Anghel Iordanescu appeared to have patched up their differences after a "simple misunderstanding." But Vladoiu said on Monday: "Iordanescu gave me false hopes earlier this month that I'd be in his sights for the World Cup finals, but he ignored me again for the decisive warm-up game against Belgium." Vladoiu was not among a record number of 17 foreign-based Romanian players named by Iordanescu to be on stand-by for the April 22 game against Belgium. Vladoiu is the third player — after Stuttgart striker Florin Raducioiu and Munchengladbach midfielder Ionut Lupescu — to refuse to join the Romanian squad.

Al-Ahram Weekly

16 - 22 April 1998

Ahmed Shawqi:

With a grain of rice

Perhaps the country's most prominent geneticist, he was originally interested in philosophy and art. Granted, he took the long and winding road

At a conference in Germany organised by the Evangelical Academy on the relation between culture and genetic engineering, Ahmed Shawqi presented a utopian proposal. He based his opening address on the importance of biology as the driving force of many aspects of progress. The information derived from biology, he argued, should be the basis of "bio-future" studies; the application of these studies will affect "bio-technology", which must be governed by a code of behaviour, "bio-ethics", to ensure security, "bio-safety", and promote big money, "bio-business". This was the first time a participant from the Third World had been invited to give the opening speech at such a conference.

Seizing this opportunity, Shawqi spoke of the gap between North and South, arguing that the progress of the North was based overwhelmingly on the genetic resources of the South. He attacked the large corporations that exploit the Third World, explaining that they profit from the natural resources of the South yet pay no compensation to the source countries.

Interested in nature and the mysteries of life from childhood, Shawqi's dream was to study philosophy or art. His family, however, regarded these fields as hobbies, not the door to an honourable and lucrative career. They impressed upon him the importance of studying science — any branch he chose, as long as it was scientific. With no great enthusiasm, he joined the Faculty of Agriculture — "after all, I enjoyed growing and tending plants." It was only in the third year, when he started studying genetics, that he began to appreciate his choice. Genetics was the study of the mysteries of life. It allowed him to study heredity, reproduction, development and evolution.

Graduating with honours in 1962, only twenty years old, he preferred the post of demonstrator at Zaqaziq University (then Zaqaziq Institute), to a better-paid job in industry, in order to further his studies. His postgraduate work dealt with different species of rice and methods of rapid production, and his Masters' thesis was entitled "Earliness and Economic Characteristics in Rice".

In the '60s and early '70s, most Egyptian students were sent to Eastern Bloc countries for their postgraduate studies, and in 1971, Shawqi went to the USSR for his Ph.D. He was assigned to the School of Genetics in Leningrad. This school was one of the few institutions in the USSR that had refuted Lysenko's hypothesis. This theory maintained that acquired characteristics are inheritable. Lysenko also claimed that the genes may be permanently modified by somatic influences, thus permitting a selective inheritance of acquired characteristics. Though Lysenko was dead by then, his theory was still being upheld as a tenet of Soviet ideology — the primacy of nurture over nature.

The genetics of micro-organisms had not been studied extensively in Egypt, and Shawqi chose to study yeast and its reproduction. He specialised in the study of mutagens (agents capable of causing change in genetic material). "I found a special type of mutagen, a base-analogue, that could be a potent mutagen in eucaryotic cells [cells which have true nuclei, a membrane, and complex chromosomes, unlike bacteria]. I succeeded in making direct mutagenesis in yeast, and discovered a particular gene that could increase its multiplication by fifty times."

It was during this time that a new branch of genetics was developed. Genetic engineering would allow the direct manipulation of genetic material to alter the hereditary traits of a cell. New types of plants and animals were tailored through the methods developed by genetic engineers: E.coli, a microbe that produces insulin for diabetics, was one of the fruits of their research. Though Shawqi's results are now obsolete, at the time they were breakthroughs.

Upon his return from the USSR, Shawqi resumed his teaching job in Zaqaziq. Until then, he had worked on mutagens with beneficial characteristics. Now he joined a group of scientists studying mutagens with damaging qualities, especially those affecting the environment. Among these were the mutagens in insecticides and chemicals used to combat bilharziasis. Their excessive use was harmful to both the ecology of the country and health of its people. "Our recommendations were fundamental in the formulation and implementation of the regulations that eliminated the use of the compounds harmful to the environment".

One year — 1985 — was a turning point in Shawqi's life. Until then he had focused on his specialisation, but, having been promoted to professorship, he felt the need to widen his activities and started taking on a more active role in society. His main concern was to propagate and popularise science. In spite of the poor equipment available, he started a television programme to clarify the significance and importance of science. He also wrote many articles in the local press, all related to scientific and technological knowledge and their reflection on society.

One of the issues discussed was the breaking of obstacles: the obstacle of space (landing on the moon), time (transport and communications), information (computers and the Internet), fusion (the transfer of plant genes to insects). He pointed out that all these achievements were by-products of science. "People must be made aware of the value of science. We can only progress and overcome our shortcomings through science and scientific methods. Scientific culture is not a luxury, it is a necessity. Science is definitely not a decorative element in our lives. Translations of scientific and educational books and films are an important factor in this respect, and so are TV programmes broadcasting scientific documentaries. Books serve the few, the literate and educated, whereas TV has a much wider audience — literate and illiterate. But a 15-minute TV programme on science, usually broadcast at an unearthly hour — around midnight — is definitely worthless."

Shawqi has translated many educational books into Arabic, the most important being *Principles of Genetics* and *Genetics and Evolution Behaviour*, both of which are used as textbooks. He also organised a programme for the translation of textbooks to be used in Egyptian universities, with the purpose of establishing a uniform syllabus. These translations were intended to replace the booklets and memoirs put out by the different teaching staff, most of which are far below the educational standard. One hundred and twenty professors are working on this project and 20 important reference books have been translated, published and used so far.

Shawqi believes that our basic and immediate need is a policy governing scientific culture, a policy with a futuristic outlook guiding all aspects of scientific culture, a policy inspired by the joint efforts of all scientific specialisations, a permanent policy that will withstand changes in personnel.

He has a very busy schedule. He has participated in many committees concerned with educational policy. He is also often asked to give lectures and organise conferences on science and scientific culture. The Coptic Evangelical Organisation for Social Services, the Orthodox See, the Catholic Church, the National Club: these are but a few of the numerous organisations he has helped in this respect. In 1992, when the Higher Council of Culture formed the committee for Scientific Culture, Shawqi was one of its founding members.

He has never abandoned his love for art and drawing, however. While attending a lecture, although it is clear the speaker has his undivided attention, he can often be seen doodling away. The result is usually a very good sketch outlining the prominent features of his model.

Apart from his post as professor of genetics at Zaqaziq University, he is the executive director of the Foreign Relations Coordination Unit at the Supreme Council of Universities, which links joint projects between Egyptian and American universities, and links all the Egyptian universities through the Internet.

He is also secretary of the Genetic Engineering Unit at the Supreme Council of Universities, a member of the Committee on Genetics at the Academy of Scientific Research, and member of the newly-found Egyptian branch of UNESCO's Committee for Bio-ethics. He was elected to the board of Oxford Resources, where 200 educational video tapes from the "Scientific Eye" programme were translated. He has written three books in Arabic: *The Future with a Scientific Eye*, *Science, the Culture of the Future*, and *Science and the Dream*. He is editor-in-chief of the *Kurrasat Mustaqbaliya* (Future Notebooks) series, of which 10 issues have thus far been published. He is also editor-in-chief of *Kurrasat Elmiya* (Science Notebooks), of which three issues have been published.

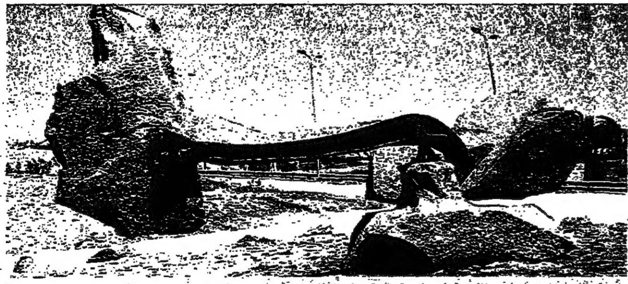
Not content with writing, translating and editing books, Shawqi is also an avid reader. He has subscriptions to several foreign publishing houses, regularly browsing through their lists of new books, always keen to order the most up-to-date publications. His wife, Aida, a former librarian, describes him as "poor and destitute, but rich in knowledge and ethics". His principal ethical trait? "His respect for women".

From his original profession as biologist interested in genetics, Shawqi has widened his interests to encompass all aspects of scientific knowledge. He is a constant and important figure at scientific conferences and workshops — an admirable example of the intellectual scientist.

Profile by **Samia Abdennour**

Pack of Cards

by Madame Sosostris



Rock Air, François Weil's contribution to the International Sculpture Symposium

♥ Summer is here with a vengeance, dears, as you may have noticed without my able help, and if you thought Cairo was hot last week, let me tell you that it was nowhere near as scalding as Aswan, where yours truly was invited, together with our very own reporter **Rania Khallaf**, to take the heat wave by the horns, so to speak. Well, it was nicer than being grabbed by El-Niño, if you want my candid opinion, which I shared with my dear **Rania**, and nothing that a few cold drinks, sipped in the shade of the trees near the pool, could not cure. Don't go thinking that this is the only thing we did in Aswan, however: most of the time we were busy romancing the stones — that is, attending lectures and perusing the 17 new art exhibits at the International Sculpture Symposium, when we were not revisiting some of the older pieces on display. As you may have guessed by now, all the sculptures are in stone. You may also wickedly believe that we favoured the museum because it was efficiently air-conditioned, but you are wrong again: this is an open-air museum where statues three metres high stand among the rocks and mountains... in the searing heat. Such courage had its rewards, however; we met famous sculptors from Spain, Jordan, Algeria, Holland, Armenia, Germany, France, Japan, Holland and Egypt, of course — artists one only reads about in specialised magazines. The governor of Aswan, **Salah Misbah**, told us that this charming spot will become a natural reserve — for endangered sculptors, I wonder? Artist **Adam Henein**, who happens to be a close friend of mine, but who was there in his capacity as head of the symposium, told us that the return to sculpting in stone is "a rediscovery of ourselves through granite". Well, I'd rather rediscover myself in silk, I must say.

In an exclusive little conversation we had with **François Weil**, the famous French sculptor, he told us confidentially that he had enjoyed the symposium tremendously, and that it was the first time he was participating in such a large gathering of international artists. We even viewed **François**'s contribution, the tautologically-titled *Rock Air*, which represents two rocks and a tree. I must say I could almost see it move. **François** also let us in on how he was feeling — quite exhilarated, it seems. "I had to forget my background entirely and concentrate on the environment and hidden sounds around me," he said. Communing with nature is not exactly my thing, dears — I am more of a lounge lady myself — but I must say that Aswan's fascinating scenery and charming inhabitants could induce a trance of bliss and inspiration in even the least mystically minded. **Samir Gharib**, head of the Cultural Development Fund, was quite happy to announce that in a few years Aswan will become internationally known as the city of sculpture. Well, I hope that none of the artists will decide to present an ice sculpture for the event next year.



One of Nazli Madkour's 30 paintings in *Palimpsest*

♠ And since I was on an artistic binge, upon my return from Aswan I inquired at once about the exhibition of my dear friend **Nazli Madkour** and found out that it will be inaugurated on Tuesday 21 April by our Culture Minister **Farouk Hosni** at the Akhnaten Gallery of the Arts Centre in Zamalek. And while you are waiting to see the paintings of this exhibition — Nazli's seventeenth — which includes 30 works in mixed media on canvas and paper under the title *Palimpsest*, I suggest that, like me, you start reading her book, *Women and Art in Egypt*. There is an English version for you, dears, who cannot yet read Arabic in the text.

♦ Before I sign off for this week, let me give a bit of advice to our juniors: if you are still in your prime, you lucky things, and are seeking a spot of higher education, here is a golden opportunity. The American Education Fair will be taking place on 25 April at the Ramses Hilton in Cairo. The fair, as you may or may not know, is co-sponsored by AMIDEAST and the American Educational Network. Imagine, you will be meeting the distinguished representatives of 29 US institutions and will be allowed to ask all the questions that you have always been afraid to ask. You will also be able to meet top officials from our Ministry of Education, businessmen, diplomats and representatives of Egyptian universities. If you are a seeker of higher education in the United States, you should mark the day on your calendar in bold red letters. Lady Luck may be on your side, you never know.

